GIRLS STAR DESIREE AKHAVAN The bisexual Lena Dunham **MARCH 2015 EXCLUSIVE** What to do when the sex stops "God loves gay people and wants us to thrive" FIT FOR PURPOSE? The best lesbian rock tribute band?

Lesbians have had ENOUGH!

This is what you've told us about FREE lesbian online dating...

"Free means 'Plenty of Fakes"

"I am happy to pay to meet women serious about meeting other women"

"I am happy to pay to meet genuine lesbians who are also looking for love"



"I WANT A QUALITY SITE WITH QUALITY WOMEN"

"I am happy to pay not to see all the same women I see on every free dating site"

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- Yes we will charge you some money
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We had 120 people to our wedding and it was beautiful. We have been very happily together for five years with four kids, a dog, cat and fish. Thank you Pink Sofa. You literally changed all of our lives.

Kerrie and Sandy



I met my partner Annie on the Pink Sofa.
Since then we have moved in together,
started our own business and we got married
in New York. It was the best day of our lives.
We can't believe our luck in finding the
perfect partner on Pink Sofa.

Kylee and Annie



Love, Friends & Community

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On the cover

DIATRIBE

It's hard coming out as a Muslim lesbian WHY WE LOVE...

Rapper DH DaHitwryter is a woman of substance

READER SUCCESS Restaurateur Emma Reynolds rules the ramen scene

DESIREE AKHAVAN The actor/writer/director lets fly on being bi

THE DYKENESS Is the cock rock covers band for real? (Clue: no)

FINN MACKAY The author of a new book resurrects radical feminism

HOW TO BE A TRANS ALLY It's not that hard to support trans people, says Paris Lees

PORTFOLIO Jane Moore makes one sketch a day – that's a lot of art

LEAP OF FAITH Is Judaism one of the most progressive religions in the UK?

VICKY BEECHING How the former Christian rock star reinvented herself after coming out

BFI FLARE FILM FESTIVAL Ten lez/bi films you won't want to miss at this year's LGBT fest

LIKING YOUR STYLE Swedish pop sensation Beatrice Eli rocks a super-cool look













HUMOUR & COMMENT LIFESTYLE

COLUMNISTS

DIVA regulars Jay Bernard, Susan Calman, Charlotte Cooper and Sarah Westwood

COMIC

Kate Charlesworth's Put A Ring On It

PICK 'N' MIX

Stuff that's caught DIVA's eye, plus Mediawatch



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EASTBOURNE TO HASTINGS

The East Sussex coast offers a winning mix of art and scenery

CITY GUIDE: EDINBURGH

Let a local guide you around Scotland's capital city

FIRST CLASS

Travel tips to help you plan your holidays

SCENE

Bristol's Hush and Indigo shindigs, plus My Scene: Manchester

THE QUICKIE

Sexy short stories by DIVA readers

SEX/LIFE

What to do when the sex has stopped

GROOMING

Three good reasons to buy British

NO PROBLEM

Troubled mind? Let DIVA ed Jane salve your sorrows

Agencies welcome LGBT people who hope to foster or adopt

TECHNOLOGY

Gadgets to help you express your selfie-love

DIARY

More lez/bi listings than you can shake a stick at



Photography Sven Bannuscher svenlerphotography.com

REVIEWS

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NEXT ISSUE Coming soon...





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EDITOR'S LETTER



We get a lot of letters from readers who, for a variety of reasons, feel that people in their lives, strangers or not, object to their right to live and identify and express themselves as they feel is right. Whether that means living openly as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, some of those women have been told that religious texts support this prejudice. In her moving interview with Louise Carolin, our cover star, the Christian theologian Vicky Beeching (p60) talks about the mental, physical and spiritual toll she and others pay because of this

prejudice. Muslim student Rose Neelam (p14) and Rabbi Ariel Friedlander (p48) also have powerful stories about how accepting families can make all the difference to living a richer life. Award-winning writer Paris Lees (p42) is back to advise us how to be better trans allies and remind us that lesbian and bisexual transwomen alone get to define who they are, not cis folk. And finally, it won't have escaped your notice that S4 Girls star Desiree Akhayan (p28) graces our pages, talking about what it's like to be a crazy-talented bisexual Iranian-American. We're smitten. Some of you have told us how sad you are that Asda has decided to stop stocking us. Why not try a DIVA subscription from as little as £7.99, saving you 33% on the full cover price? The price includes free early delivery and exclusive subscriber-only covers. That way, if you can't find us in your local store, you'll never miss out.

> Jane Czyzselska **DIVAMAG.CO.UK**

DIVA

Editor Jane Czyzselska "Leshianism **Deputy editor** Louise Carolin

What's your religion?

Editorial assistant Carrie Lvell "Whichever advocates naps

Designer Fernando Safont

"If I wanted clowns in my life, I'd be in a circus"

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NEXT MONTH



APRIL ISSUE on sale 26 March

Football icon Casey Stoney (left) and her fiancee Megan Harris speak exclusively to DIVA Rock icon Melissa Etheridge hooks up with DIVA for a good old chin-wag Rachel Shelley meets a lesbian volunteer who travelled to Liberia to help fight Ebola Still bi: holding onto your bisexual identity in a long-term relationship Beyond the binary: non-binary gueers on life outside of male and female When Charlotte Cooper gave up alcohol, she realised what she'd been missing Biryani, babes and bicyles: Emily Chappell cycles a gueer route through Pakistan

CONTACT US!



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Star Letter

LOVE, RAGE AND PRIDE

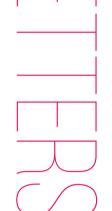
the should have

I have just read I Love Your Rage by Jay Bernard (February) and am compelled to write as it is so relevant to me. I have recently been disowned by my dad. In our final meeting he pointed an accusatory finger: "Why are you so angry? You are meant to be happy and be humble." This can be translated as: "Women should not be angry! It is unattractive, unnerving and perplexing." After a flustered moment I responded: "There is so much in the world to be angry about!" Since then I have embraced my anger and owned it. It shocks both colleagues and family on a daily basis but I've realised it drives me to act! If I see injustice or a feminist issue that needs addressing, I get angry and I fight it. I will not stay quiet, submissive and falsely happy to make others comfortable. I am always so pleased and relieved to read articles in DIVA that speak to me so directly. It means I don't have to feel alone in my thoughts, passions and what sometimes feel, in my relatively straight world, like mad, revolutionary beliefs. I am angry, I will make change and I am proud!

VICTORIA, Stafford

ED: We're sure you'll find a revolutionary use for your Star Letter prize, Victoria!





STAR LETTER Prize

This month's star letter writer is one lucky duck, as they've bagged a personalised canvas worth £55.95 from the lovely folks at Illuminated Canvas. Two names will go inside this graffiti heart print for a completely bespoke gift. Green with envy? Have a look at the whole range and get your own at lluminated canvas.co.uk



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or use the old-fashioned method and drop us a line at

DIVA MAGAZINE

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THE COURAGE TO COME OUT

Caroline's letter (The Claustrophobic Closet, February) made me think about the way women who "find themselves" come out. I no longer need to hide or lead a double life. I was married for nearly 20 years have three beautiful children. My marriage was falling apart but I kept it going. Quite by chance I started to socialise with a woman I had worked with for many years, and we began an affair. When you admit or when you're found out, there are decisions to be made. I had fallen in love with this woman and still am (we married last year). Our friends made their choices, including my ex-father in law: we are still in contact! Everyone who mattered in our separate lives turned up for our marriage.

We may hurt people by our actions but we are living a life which is true to our love and convictions. I gave up everything and gained everything. Tell your reader she must do what she feels best with but there will be pain, questions and negative emotions.

There is no manual or magazine, just belief. Self-awareness takes great courage. She's right, DIVA magazine is a huge forum and has given me a great insight into women (although not as much as my wife!). Thank you.

.....

HELEN

PART OF THE COMMUNITY

I am 51 and have two university-aged daughters. I came out to some after my marriage to their dad broke up in 2009, and I do struggle to find stories and info that is geared towards my age group and situation. However, this last issue of DIVA was a really good

read and it does help me feel part of the queer community in a way I always hoped (but was very scared) to be. The arts coverage was particularly impressive and inspiring. Slowly I am catching up with the gay culture I missed all those years and that helps me to return to myself. Thanks!

TLG, Edinburgh

PS How lucky are Jack and Allegra, and Stella and Shelley? Sigh!

TO BI OR NOT TO BI?

My 4½ year relationship is unfortunately coming to an end. The questions that this has thrown open in my mind are many.... The relationship I have just had was my first with a woman and now this is over, am I also closing a chapter on my lesbian/bi life too? I was not a closet lesbian waiting for the right person to draw me out into the open; I was previously married to a man and however unsuccessful that was, it was not because he was a man and I was a lesbian. When I fell in love with my most recent beau I had never slept with or dated a woman but I was certainly not closed off to the experience and I guess therein lies the answer... I am open to falling in love with whomever it should happen with; I am simply a free-minded individual who will fall for who I fall for, no selfimposed or society-imposed barriers will change this.

The chapter I am closing is therefore purely on my current relationship and my sexuality need not be questioned as I am sure I will, once again, fall for who I fall for!

SARAH BELLA ROMANO

Opinions expressed by correspondents and contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors of DIVA magazine or its publishers.





JOIN US TODAY!

@AudMKo13

Love the Jack n Allegra article, Match made in kitchen heaven.

@emstararama

Interview with @MsJackMonroe and @ AllegraMcEvedy in @DIVAmagazine. Love. Love. Love. It.

@funkiepiano

Oh wow @MsJackMonroe on cover this month, @vickybeeching next, 2 of my fave ladies, @DIVAmagazine you are treating me x

@SCG66

@shelleysilas @stellduffy a wonderful warm and honest article in @

make us a coffee and just chat!:) x

@Pen66

Loved the interview in @DIVAmagazine with @stellduffy & @shelleysilas. So warm, intimate, loving and real.

DIVAmagazine that made me want to

@emilyimacaulay

@stellduffy Read @DIVAmagazine. Your honestly has moved, affected & helped me before. And it will again. Thank you, love to you and @shelleysilas.

@JewelsHigham

I've decided to resubscribe directly for your print edition to come to me at home to guarantee I get it. Can't wait :))

SADISTIC TANGO

Thank you for your interview with Sally Wainwright about why she killed off Kate (divamag.co.uk).

Last Tango In Halifax is the first programme I've seen to represent how I feel as a lesbian and the struggle for me to accept my sexuality. I feel killing off Kate was completely unnecessary and actually, particularly given the manner and timing of her death, cruel

and almost sadistic.

Sally's interview just made me more angry as it seems even she doesn't know why she did it. Also, dismissing the dead lesbian trope as a myth is infuriating. I had high hopes that we would get a positive portrayal of lesbians from her, I should know better to put my faith in TV programmes/ writers.

HELEN

Pleased to meet you!



Every issue, we invite one of our readers to tell us about her relationship with DIVA.

NAME & AGE: LISA DAVENPORT, 46 FROM: **GLOUCESTERSHIRE OCCUPATION: CHARITY WORKER**

WHAT MADE YOU START READING DIVA?

Recommended by a friend when I first came out in 2001. she talked me through the purchase over the phone in WHSmith. I still have that issue: it's a very cherished copy with Helen and Nikki from Bad Girls on the cover... It was an interesting time to come out; lots of positive role models in the media, including Ellen DeGeneres.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A READER?

I've been a reader since then April 2001.

PRINT OR DIGITAL?

Definitely print. I like to keep them on my coffee table.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT DIVA?

I love the funny stuff and the travel reviews. A section on amusing holiday destinations would be a dream come true.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE OF?

I would like to see more local stuff covered... DIVA used to have great reviews of organiations and events happening all over the country. It helps people living out of London to have belief that they aren't on their own. It can be quite isolating living in the Shires, especially now there are less visible clubs and bars.

HOW MANY PEOPLE READ YOUR COPY?

I think I'm the only one... unless my dog takes the odd peek when no one is about.

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR COPY AFTER YOU'VE READ IT?

Send a photo and your answers to the questions above to

I tend to throw away my old copies but would like to be brave enough to leave them where it would get more exposure, like GP surgeries and the rest room at work. I'm a closet anarchist.

WHO WOULD YOU PUT ON THE COVER AND WHY?

P!nk. Sue Perkins and Jill Jackson... and me!



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DV225



Politics: no stranger than fiction



Six AM. It's morning in an election year, and the baby carrots of social change are about to be dangled. From

a window in Westminster, Our Dear Leader David Cameron is looking out at the crystalline city, trying to work out how the peasants citizens of this country can be massaged into voting for him again.

After a perfectly normal breakfast that any ordinary Londoner could relate to, he gives a speech saying somethingsomething about robust measures for tackling a social malaise he has never experienced. And good news: there's been a revelation about the EU causing lethal tumours in the babies of those on unemployment benefits, so staying might not be such a bad thing.

Meanwhile, in a quiet corner of the web, a new book has been launched by a group of female hackers, programmers and activists: "We live in dark times," writes Allison Burtch, "Some of us are just becoming aware of the global struggle, others can't feed their children... every part of you is a liability, all problems are potential profit. The fish in the ocean will be gone by 2050." The book is called Deep Lab which might be an allusion to the deep web, the vast array of information that

cannot be found via ordinary search engines - and it contains a number of fascinating articles about art, war, media consumption and how we are being coerced - the work of people trying to dissect the political fog.

Around lunchtime David meets with some corporate lobbyists who are keen to ensure that their profound social contribution of precarious jobs, general hysteria, uncertainty and wanton greed goes undisturbed. When they are done with Cameron, they waft over to Milliband. Cameron then has a quick drink with The Far Right, who, despite thousands of front pages to the contrary, endlessly repeat that immigration is never talked about. Cameron pats The Far Right's shoulder and says they remind him of some of his closest friends.

Meanwhile, Jen Lowe pursues a fascinating project about how pregnant women are followed around the internet – their data is worth fifteen times the amount of the rest of us - and how Mastercard seriously believe those suffering the trauma of war might be able to shop their way out of it. And Claire L Evans explores what cyberfeminism looked and still looks like: a manifesto in the form of a bulging fish eye, decrying "terminators of the moral code, mercenaries of slime... corrupting the discourse, we are the future cunt". Women who wanted to "worldbuild

WITH MAY'S **ELECTIONS** LOOMING, JAY BERNARD **IMAGINES** A WORLD-CHANGING INTERVENTION

outside of patriarchy".

And as the evening draws to a close, in a perfectly normal pub, with normal men in normal flat caps, Nigel Farage is smirking into a pint of stout; he cannot believe how lucky he's been. Who knew that nearly every institution in Britain would spread its legs at some sexy immigrant-baiting. Which he is not doing. He is a normal man with a normal pint of stout. And certainly more normal than Russell Brand, who, somewhere else - possibly a gritty council estate, possibly a mansion - is exposing his chest hairs trying to get a good shot with some crackheads.

Meanwhile, Deep Lab reads like the hot, zany party political broadcast of your dreams. A straightforward, thoughtful voice delivering the best possible version of the truth. Four of the collective have written about the terrifying Torture Report and try to make it less evasive. Denise Caruso asks a question it is impossible to answer here: if something is too complex, too subtle for ordinary people to participate in, is it outside of democratic control? And Ingrid Burrington says, simply, "Fuck the market, fuck prestige economics, fuck respectability politics".

As Cameron gets into bed, satisfied with another day's work, there's a hum that shivers round the internet and goes quiet. It's the bit that's been neglected. It's the bigger idea. •

"We live in dark times. Some of us can't feed our children"



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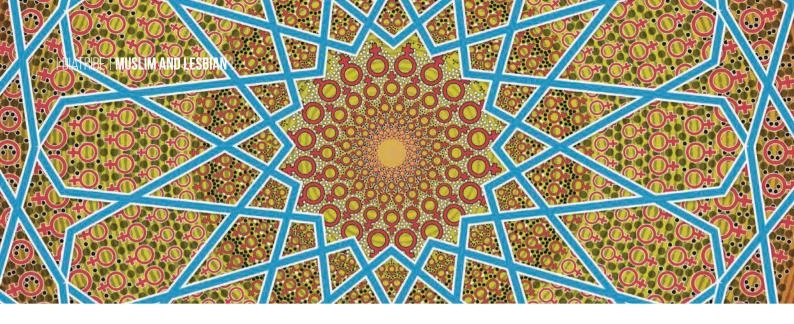












"Muslim lesbians are seen with suspicion"

DON'T TELL **ROSE NEELAM** THAT SHE **SHOULD** TRY TO FIT IN BETTER

It can be

a battle

to come

out as

Muslim in

the main-

stream

lesbian

community



Sitting in the red chair at the Open Barbers hair salon, I am looking in the mirror at my stylist Greygory and myself

in amazement. I finally did it; my hair finally matches my new Imam Butch Boi look for 2015. What's more, it's got a 90s feminist feel, I'm told. If my hair was a film it would be Deepa Mehta's 1996 movie, Fire: taboo-smashing with a hint of the traditional.

Sharing about my hairstyle isn't just something light and airy I'm doing to be cute, it's central to my journey. You see, many white non-Muslim lesbians look at me now and think "she fits in and she's one of us". Many within the lesbian community view me as an "exotic butch queer woman" yet don't respect my Muslim identity, regardless of how I present myself.

I'm 23 now but learning to accept my intersectional identities has taken me a while. A few years ago I used to wear the hijab through personal choice. Contrary to popular and media-perpetuated belief, we Muslim women have the capabilities to think independently. At 19 I found myself depressed, harming myself and wondering if I would ever have the confidence to love who I am or remain trapped in a life that others wanted me to live.

Knowing who you are and equally fearing that you can never live your truth has can be harmful to your mental and physical wellbeing. My internal struggles made me wonder about

whether my faith and sexuality could co-exist, and whether there were other women like me anywhere in the world.

After much soul-searching I let those halal beers pour and sang, "I'm coming out, I want the mosque to know", and with the Grace of Allah (oh, by the way Allah is just the Arabic name for god, or Big Al as I like to say), I came out to myself. Finally, in 2011, on a morning in a month I can't recall, I woke up, ready to tell the world I'm a Muslim dyke. With unconditional support from friends, comrades and some allies, I unveiled my sexuality not only in my religious community, but in the mainstream lesbian community, too.

As is the case for many women, my life changed drastically after coming out; death threats from fringe extremists to suddenly finding myself speaking across Europe to audiences about gender, sexuality and Islam. One thing that I did not expect to happen was the policing of Muslim lesbians by some white and non-Muslim lesbians.

But soon after coming out I found myself being told I was not welcome in specific lesbian social spaces because my wearing of the hijab makes some lesbians uncomfortable. I thought my plaid hijab was more than fitting; I have no idea why these sisters felt uncomfortable. Hijab or not, Muslim lesbians are seen with suspicion, deemed as an oppressed minority and often pressured into not coming out as Muslim.

It can be a battle at times to come out as a Muslim lesbian in the mainstream lesbian community. My experience is not uncommon among Muslim lesbians. While our issues are somewhat complex in our faith community, it is deeply saddening that in the very community we hope to seek refuge in, we are often considered outsiders.

On International Women's Day (8 March), let's celebrate women, all women, and respect each other's intersecting identities of race, religion and sexuality. We as women should not conform to the expectations of others nor seek validation from any authority except ourselves in regards to how we look and how we express our sexuality. So I ask all women to be allies and I urge some of you to stop asking and assuming the following about us, please:

"You can't be Muslim and a lesbian." "I've never slept with a Muslim lesbian; I've got to tell my friends

"Do you have to wear that hijab? Can't you just fit in a bit more?"

about this."

"What do you think about terrorism and stuff?"

"Are Muslim vaginas different than normal vaginas?"

"Are your parents going to force you into marriage now that they know you're a lesbian?"

"Do you know Irshad Manji?"

"I will free you from your oppression, cos I know your religion oppresses you."

"OMG you're a Muslim and lesbian? That's totally radical!" "How do you shower wearing a hijab?" **⊙**

For more about faith and sexuality, see p48 and 61.

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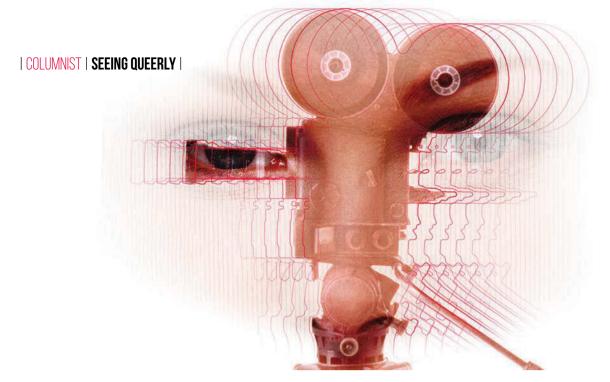
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QUEER FILM FAN **CHARLOTTE** COOPER **RAIDS THE CELLULOID** CLOSET



I've just been fast-forwarding through Mai Zetterling's lurid film Scrubbers (1982) hoping to catch sight of Ed-

die, a character played by Kate Ingram. The film is set in a women's prison, it's really dykey and there's a short sequence about 50 minutes in where the inmates have a party. Everyone dances fabulously but it is here that I really fall in love with Eddie, a petty thief and a fighter (weapon of choice: table tennis bat). Her moves are pitch perfect early 80s butch, she does a rude boy skank in her crappy leather jacket and then some greaser angel-dipping. I swoon. It's amazing how those tiny moments stay in my imagination and ignite a sense of my own queerness. I'm sure others feel the same way.

Cinema theorist Vito Russo famously argued that although queers were and are marginalised in Hollywood, you can read a film and take pleasure in background characters and coded representations. For me this has been about finding myself in work that was not originally intended for my eyes. Nighthawks and Taxi Zum Klo, two films from 1978 and 1980, whose protagonists are gay schoolteachers, depict a queer scene that I was never a part of, and yet I find the gritty everydayness of the setting very relatable. I remember

when things were like that and the films allow me to weave myself into those places simply by watching them.

The films that I'm supposed to like are rarely the ones I actually like. Wellcrafted, Oscar®-winning movies featuring positive images of beautiful people leave me feeling flat. Lianna, the first film that I saw where the lesbian character was the point of the plot, I remember being uncool and worthy in 1983. I've never revisited it, though perhaps it works now as a period piece or something to enjoy ironically.

But there are others, also dated, that still speak to me and these tend to be a little rougher. The scenes of Tala Brandeis, a trans leatherdyke who died earlier this year, wielding her bullwhip in Bloodsisters (1995) feel as though they are a part of my soul. She's in a crowd at Pride or somesuch and people hop into the space, scared and excited, to allow her to whip them! In Lucy Thane's documentary about the queercore scene from around the same time, She's Real (Worse than Queer), yours truly is there in the audience at a Tribe 8 show. I have become one of Vito Russo's background film

In recent times I have put myself in the picture by making my own short films. These have been selected for screenings at various film festivals around the world to some acclaim. My aesthetic is DIY, raw, no-budget and

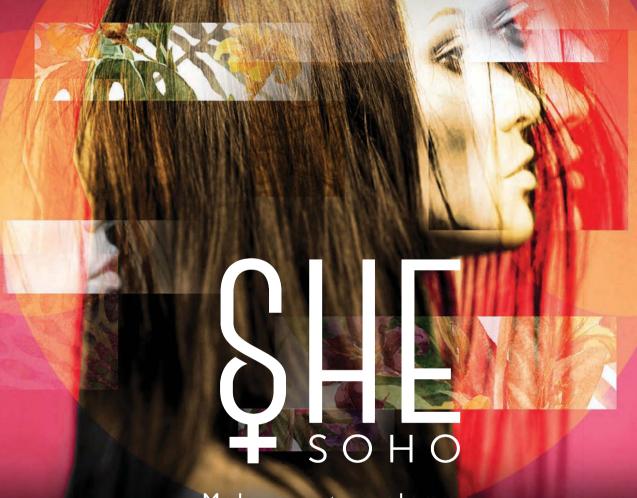
no-fi. I find work like this inspiring but I've also found that others don't. A few years ago I politely nodded as a filmmaker told me they were prompted to make their own film after seeing something terrible at a queer film festival. They described the film in detail. Either they hadn't recognised me or they wanted to put me in my place, because the work they were describing was minel

A queer film is a work of memory and community as well as celluloid and projector. I remember going to a matinee of Shortbus (2006) and becoming aware that the lone guys at the screening were getting off on the orgy scenes. Not that I'm any better, the back row at the now defunct Metro off Shaftesbury Avenue springs to mind. But the best audience reaction was at a much-hyped festival showing of some lesbian porn, a sell-out screening, hotly anticipated. Alas it was boring, too slow, shoddy, it didn't work as a feature, the programmers had mis-judged it. One by one people started to leave, and then groups and clumps of people walked out, shouting at the screen and giving it the finger. It was electrifying to see queers refusing to be satisfied with rubbish, I'll never forget it. •

BFI Flare, the London LGBT film festival, takes place 19-29 March. See p66 for DIVA's pick of the highlights.

The films that I'm supposed to like are rarely the ones I actually like

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How to get a man in



No one ever stays at my house. Why? Well apart from my insomnia, the shrine to Helen Mirren in the

spare bedroom and the cat hair on the cooker, the main reason is embarrass-

We bought our flat 13 years ago and we got it cheap. Not least because the previous occupants had extensively renovated the property by ripping out all original, and beautiful, features and replacing them with everything that was fashionable in the 1970s. Cork tiles, ceilings lowered with sheets of plywood, built-in cabin beds. It's taken us years to tackle each monstrosity of a room, one by one, to try to restore it to its former glory, and most of it we've managed without any professional assistance, apart from one room. The bathroom.

It's difficult to adequately describe the true horror of the room. As you enter, one wall is entirely covered with mirrored tiles. Consequently there hasn't been a single night since I moved in when I haven't screamed. thinking someone else was in the bathroom with me. The rest of the room is clad in pine, badly-fitted of course. Obligatory cork tiles on the floor and a solitary, home-made shower cubicle,

with a light suspended by a piece of string. It's half Swedish porn set, half serial-killer lair.

The bottom line is that it's too much for me to do myself. And I won't let my wife get involved with anything electrical, given that the last time she got all "Do It Yourself" with the wiring she nearly did herself in. I've put off renovations for years mainly because I've had some bad experience with workmen in the past. And before anyone gets all up in my grill, they have always been men (more of that later). Some examples of "interesting" encounters with tradesmen include:

- A man arrived at the flat to give me a quote for new windows and asked if we should wait for my husband to come home so he could talk to someone who knows about these things. I told him we would be waiting a long time.
- The builder who tried to tell me my entire tenement block was falling down and we'd need to move out for six months, when there was a tiny crack on my ceiling.

I've spoken to a number of friends about this. I know that in London, and perhaps some other cities, it's possible to get either female contractors or specifically LGBT-friendly ones but I know of none in Glasgow. I'd love to support the queer economy and female builders but the simple fact is

HER DIY SKILLS **DEFEATED** BY HER BATHROOM, **SUSAN CALMAN HIRES** A TRADESMAN

Our 70s bathroom is half **Swedish** porn set, half serialkiller lair

that, despite searching, they're as rare as unicorns. Part of me also thinks that in 2015 all contractors should be fine with any client, whatever their living arrangement. I should be able to call any tradesman and ask them to fix something in my flat without feeling I need to hide my signed photos of Jodie Foster and Orange Is The New Black duvet cover.

So how did we find our plumber? Quite simply, we asked friends for personal recommendations and then we contacted the one that sounded reliable and interviewed him. He seemed nice, liked the cats and didn't react as if we were any different from any other clients. Which, of course, we aren't. It's important to be sure about who you employ when you are, as I am, going to be locked in a flat with a stranger for two weeks. You need to feel safe with them and know that they won't react as if you're in a freak show or your life is a filthy joke.

Getting a man in is the only option I have to rid me of my bathroom shame and, despite past experiences, I'm thinking positive. And I hope he is as well. Although, in hindsight, he may have found the experience of being interrogated by two legally-trained lesbians with attack cats quite intimidating.

Good. 0

susan@divamag.co.uk



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Bring back the romance



Welcome to my March column, where love is so last month. February's bouquet of garage roses has wilted,

the loving Valentine's card has been jettisoned, and someone, not you, has scarfed the last chocolate in the box. Right about now romance is hanging by a very fine piece of old, comfyknicker elastic. But fear not because this column is about how to keep the love alive when the memories of Valentine's have faded and love is flatlining.

A friend of mine recently shared with me a very personal text message from her wife of six years. The message was sent from their toilet, where her wife was experiencing the dual onslaught of period cramps and diarrhoea. It ended with the memorable phrase: "I'm barely hanging on. Bring fajitas and tampons." This desperate bulletin sums up the inevitable trajectory of relationships: one minute you're sexting, "I want to get naked with you;)" and the next you're texting, "Bring loo roll. Just wiped arse with face cloth". Routine and familiarity creep into every relationship so it's important to keep the romance alive, or like a Tamagotchi, it will get buried under a poop pyramid and expire.

So how do you keep the romance going when there's an endless deluge

IN THE POST-VALENTINE'S SLUMP, SARAH WESTWOOD **GIVES FADING** ROMANCE THE KISS OF LIFE

Nothing kills the mood more than the sound of your phone parping away

of daily chores to dampen your ardour? And what happens when the mystery has gone and your partner discovers that their chilled-out lover has a pillow-poofing obsession, or that they're partial to a noisy splodge of HP sauce on their baked beans? Or perhaps they've walked in on you with a cotton bud sticking out each ear, wearing a Veet moustache and tweezering your belly hair, as happened to another "friend".

One answer is to be spontaneous. Don't plan romance, just grab her and snog her whenever the mood strikes. Unless the mood strikes while the iron's hot, in which case let her switch if off first for safety reasons. If you're feeling the passionate clinch and she's finishing the chickpea curry, pop it in the fridge: it'll keep. And if, during that passionate embrace, you catch sight of a bulging bin-bag, refrain from whispering in her ear, "I might just pop that recycling out now, love". In fact, banish all thoughts of bin collection dates from your mind. Pay no heed to the cat's forgotten flea treatment, the load of washing, red bill, blinking light bulb or wobbly knob. Take stock. There's a sexy woman in your kitchen; everything else can wait.

How to keep the romance alive is a timeless question. Many years ago my mum issued me a stark warning: don't get too comfy in a relationship, she said, by which she specifically meant no pyjamas before bed time, or better still, no pyjamas ever. She was adamant that I desist from whipping off my bra at the door in joyful relief, and pulling on a pair of unflatteringly baggy lounge pants in which to greet my girlfriend. According to her glamorous seventies sensibilities, the crinkling of my flannelette PJs was the sound of a fire extinguisher being emptied on the burning flames of passion. I'm not sure I'm ready to give up this comfy habit just yet, but there is one thing I'm going to be more conscious about: from now on I'm banning the bed office.

Many of us bring our work to bed with us. We dive into our horizontal desk of an evening, and discuss spreadsheets between the sheets with our colleague, sorry partner. But work is not conducive to sexy time, so I'm going to try and keep it out of the boudoir. From now on my mattress shall be reserved for snogging not slogging, for massage oil not daily toil. I shall not transform it into a very large, very comfy desk, with the perfect surface area for spreading out a whole year's tax receipts. And while I'm at it, I'll banish all unnecessary devices, because nothing kills the mood more reliably than the sound of your phone parping away like a flatulent dog beside the bed. From now on, I'm going to resist the urge to curl up with my emails of an evening, and choose a real live human woman person instead. •











2014









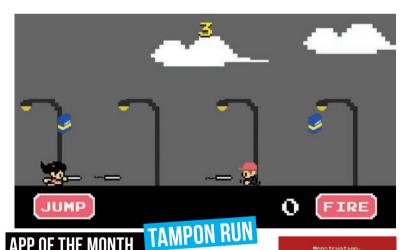
PERSON OF THE MONTH

The Labour Party parliamentary candidate for Sutton and Cheam is not like many other politicians. Not only is she a blind lesbian trans woman from a working class family, but she's rather likeable, too. Emily, who lost her sight in childhood, previously worked for the Equality and **Human Rights Commission before** she was selected as a Labour Party candidate last year, and we've been following her election campaign closely since her brilliant retort to a cruel joke by Ron Liddle in The Sun. Asked by Liddle how she knew "she was the wrong sex", being blind, Emily said: "I wonder how he knows he's a man when he turns the light out." Amazingly, Liddle apologised. "I wish Emily the very best and I'd definitely vote for her if I lived in

Sutton and Cheam," he said.

So would we.





Back in December, DIVA covered a brilliant 8-bit game called Tampon Run, created by high schoolers Andrea Gonzales and Sophie Houser. Now the game is available as an app! Like the web game, the iOs version features a girl throwing tampons at enemies who try and confiscate them. If our protagonist runs out of tampons, it's game over.

"Our goal from the beginning has been to reach as wide an audience as possible to provoke discussion about the menstrual taboo, and encourage more girls to learn to code," Sophie says. "Women are taught throughout their lives that their periods are something to feel ashamed of," added Andrea. "We're excited to see that Tampon Run has helped women and girls feel that their period is not only a normal and natural bodily function, but something to own and love."

Download Tampon Run free from the App Store now.

Her totally normal. And wet, somen are taught that life subarrassing. And crude. No we made a came to combat the stigma. Our here is armed mith tampons. Her mission is to rid the world of the sometrual tabbo. Figure to work our minutes.

CELEBRITY TWEETS

@RubyRose

Love is contagious, so is hate...which one are you willing to be responsible for spreading.

@sueperkins

Today I have eaten a basket of muffins, a duck and a cake with Jennifer Saunders' face on it. I need @ AnnaRichardso book #mindoverfatter

@katemoennig

I have snow jealousy. I say this while sitting outside in a tshirt.

@iHartbeat

I highly dislike shopping for clothes in Los Angeles... Everything is fuck you sized.

@clarebalding

Oh dear. Crying properly after #LastTangoInHalifax. Damn it that Sarah Lancashire is a great actress. Wonderful last episode.

DIVA READER'S REVIEW... LICX LUBE

"Licx gel and cream lubes are gorgeously designed, top-quality products which smell and taste great. A little goes a long way, either with a partner or by yourself – far better value than some of the other big-name brands on the market. Licx is water-based, smooth and sensual and won't leave you feeling sticky. There's a variety of packaging to suit every circumstance, including a pump bottle and tube as well as 5ml sachets – great if you're on the go. They also have 'intimate wipes' if you need a quick clean up and your partner can't oblige. Would definitely recommend!" (JW)

licx.co.uk



MFDIAWATCH WITH CARRIE LYELL

THE DEAD LESBIAN TROPE THAT WON'T GO AWAY



It's been over a month now since I interviewed Last Tango In Halifax writer Sally Wainwright and her words are still

ringing in my ears. Why is it always the lesbian characters that get killed off, I asked, and tried my darnedest to control my voice and my disbelief as she replied, "I think that's a myth".

I wasn't the only one shocked by her refusal to acknowledge something so obvious. The internet (or my timeline, anyway) lit up with anger from people furious that in 2015, lesbians still aren't allowed a happy ending. Be it film, TV or literature, if the lesbians aren't killed off, we're mad or dangerous or just plain unhappy.

Even the highly-anticipated Banana (E4), which promised a myriad of perspectives on modern gay life, has fallen victim to TV cliches. Scotty's "stalker" story was painful to watch and did nothing to dispel the tragic lesbian trope. Thanks for nothing, Russell T Davies.

Of course, it's a drama and people die. I know. And perhaps Sally is right when she says it's not a conscious decision. But that to me is almost worse. We're so incidental to the story that writers don't even notice that we're always the ones with a terminal illness or a serious mental health problem. It's always our relationships that break down. It's always us under the wheels of a car, or in a parachute accident, or kidnapped, raped or murdered.

Whether Sally chooses to acknowledge it or not, the fact remains. We're always used as plot device driving a heterosexual narrative that's more important than our lives and I've had enough. Where's my remote?

@Seei.

PERSONAL AD PHRASES

...and their true meanings

HONEST, TRUSTWORTHY

I lie through my teeth, but know that won't get me any responses

FUN-LOVING

I will be passed out drunk by the end of the evening

SEEKING SOMEONE GENUINE

I got screwed over in my last relationship, and will ramble on bitterly about my ex all throughout our date

SEEKING SOMEONE SOLVENT

I've maxed out my credit card, and look forward to doing the same to yours

OPEN-MINDED

I will shag anyone and anything, from your ex to your pet budgie

SPONTANEOUS

I'll get up and suddenly leave during our date if I spot someone better-looking walking past, but I'll still ring you at 3am when I've got nothing (and no one) better to do

CAREFREE

I'll turn up three and a half hours late to our first (and only) date, expect you to pay for everything as I've left my money at home, and will then go home with someone I meet in the taxi queue, leaving you alone

HOME-LOVING

I rarely leave the house, so will no doubt bore you rigid until you have to stick forks in your leg to stay awake

DISCREET

I have a husband and six children at home, so you will never be able to contact me, and I can only meet you on the third Thursday of every fifth month (and will say you're my sister to anyone we meet)

STRAIGHT-ACTING

If you come anywhere near me in public, I will run shrieking down the street in panic

LOOKING FOR FRIENDSHIP MARRY ME! NOW!!!!!



Cardology are a small, family business who've been designing hand-made Kirigami pop-up cards since April last year. Run by David Faulkner, his wife and sister-in-law, they've recently launched a range of wedding and Valentine's cards aimed at same-sex couples. "Our decision to launch gay wedding cards came from experience of trying to choose an appropriate card for a friend's wedding," says David. Check them out at *cardology.co.uk*



SHE MAKES NO BOKES ABOUT

With her friend and business partner Ken Yamada, Emma Reynolds opened Tsuru, which serves hand-made sushi and katsu curries, behind the Tate Modern in 2007. The friends had been talking for years about opening a restaurant: they both loved Japanese food and at the time Japanese and sushi and katsu joints were scarce outside of the more expensive areas of central London. Their aim? To serve decent Japanese food that was authentic and affordable. They started with a sushi stall on London's Broadway Market for a while to test things out before opening in Bankside on the River Thames. Their success spurred them on to set up their ramen restaurant, Tonkotsu (rough translation: "pig bones"), in Soho in 2012. In 2013 they won the Observer Food Monthly Award for Best Cheap Eats in 2013 for Tonkotsu Soho. They've since grown to three more locations in Shoreditch, Selfridges Foodhall and Hackney Central.

DIVA Have you always been interested in food and cooking?

EMMA REYNOLDS: Yes! I did lots of home cooking with both my parents and my granny and auntie. My brother and I were encouraged to try lots of different food at home, in restaurants and when we went away on holiday. I was always excited about cooking. From the age of five to 10, Thursday nights after school we baked cakes with my auntie, which I loved.

What do you love most about Japanese and far eastern food?

EMMA
REYNOLDS'
CHAIN OF
JAPANESE
RESTAURANTS
IS GOING FROM
STRENGTH TO
STRENGTH
WORDS JANE
CZYZSELSKA

Its diversity and specialism. Especially in Japan, you'll find restaurants specialising in one dish. Keep it simple, do it well. Ten years ago in the UK, you'd think of sushi if someone asked about Japanese food, then teppanyaki, and tempura. Now it's more about ramen.

You've just opened a Tonkotsu on Mare Street in Hackney Central. Tell us about it.

It's our biggest restaurant, with a couple of new dishes – seafood ramen and okonomiyaki – and it has a full cocktail bar.

What's your workplace philosophy?

We've always really cared about people receiving a friendly welcome, having fun and getting good value. Food-wise, we use the best sustainable produce we can find and make tasty food that we hope people crave to come back for.

The aesthetic in both Tsuru and Tonkotsu is utilitarian and relaxed – what's the thinking behind the decor in each brand?

We like to change the look for each site. Tsuru's decor is a little different from Tonkotsu's, though we do use English oak to make the furniture for all restaurants. Tsuru is a little more fast-takeaway functional. In Soho we ripped out the ceiling to give an industrial look and Tonkotsu East is in a red brick railway arch, which needs very little other than lighting to look beautiful. Mare Street is our biggest restaurant and has a sevenmetre-long zinc bar top and noodle ropes hanging from the ceiling.

You've got your own-brand chilli sauce selling in your restaurants and in Selfridges; are there plans for more gastro-merch?

Yes, we sell Eat The Bits chilli oil in the restaurants, Selfridges and online through World of Zing. It has some big fans including Jay Rayner and Tom Parker Bowles. Hopefully it'll be in a national supermarket soon...

Tell us about Lily & Skinner...

L&S is a group of people who run bars and restaurants in Hackney. The group started naturally – just an idea to get together to see if we could help one another out with anything from staff to marketing. It works really well. There are nine of us at the moment, coincidentally all women.

You're one of a growing number of lesbian foodie business owners/ entrepreneurs in London – what's the food biz like for lesbians in your experience?

I can think of quite a few! Hospitality is changing, once the preserve of shouty male chefs, it's now a very open and collaborative industry – whilst remaining intensely competitive. I haven't really experienced any homophobia.

What would you like to achieve in the next five years?

Not sure there's room in DIVA for the full list. So I'll say: open a few more restaurants and take some holidays! •

tonkotsu.co.uk tsuru-sushi.co.uk

"Jay Rayner and Tom Parker Bowles are fans of our ownbrand chilli sauce"

| INTERVIEW | **DESIREE AKHAVAN** |

Bisexual Iranian-American writer/director/actor Desiree Akhavan first came to my attention with her webseries The Slope, in which she and thengirlfriend Ingrid Jungermann played hilarious homophobic hipster versions of themselves. Now her feature film Appropriate Behaviour, which she wrote, directed and starred in, is about to open in UK cinemas. Desiree once again plays a character with similarities to herself: an Iranian-American bisexual trying to navigate her awkward Girls-style NYC life. Lena Dunham was such a fan of the movie she cast Desiree in season four of Girls, as one of Hannah's grad-school classmates. "I'm terrified about Girls," says Desiree with disarming frankness. "I've never acted for other directors, not even in short films. I've only done The Slope and Appropriate Behaviour, so I'm so scared."

In AB, recently-single Shirin endeavours to get her girlfriend back while also: keeping her bisexuality hidden from her parents, trying to hold down a job teaching film studies to preschoolers and spilling a fair few drinks. "I am an extremely clumsy person," says Desiree (who, FYI, is also charming and articulate), "I spilled a whole glass of water on myself in an interview vesterday."

But, although she shares traits and experiences with her character, Desiree is clear that she hasn't made a documentary. "I don't see Shirin as me, which may seem absurd because that is my body and my face and this is my sense of humour and I am Iranian and bisexual, so therefore it must be me, but I think the minute you write something down it becomes fiction. I was dealing with a particularly painful break-up and the aftermath of having come out to my family, but I never wanted to make a diary entry. I wanted to take something very personal and elevate it to a level that could potentially speak to a wider audience, people who didn't have the experience of being Iranian bisexuals living in NYC. I don't feel exposed, it doesn't feel raw or humiliating to me."

DIVA: Ironically, for an artist whose work concerns labels and what happens when we can't or won't fit them, you're now being labelled as everything from "The Iranian Lena Dunham" to "The female Woody

JOANNA BENECKE TALKS MOVIE-MAKING, **BISEXUALITY** AND **LABELLING** WITH DESIREE **AKHAVAN**

"We need

more bi

people to

be out and

honest and

open and

reclaim it"

Allen making the lesbian Annie Hall".

DESIREE AKHAVAN: I didn't realise I was going to get so much more labelling! You need to not give a shit or think about it too much, because the way you sell a film is very different from how you create it. The whole point of the film is the fact that I was never able to fit nicely into categorisations of what an Iranian girl is like, what a gay person is like, and how you're supposed to navigate your life in whatever marginalised community you're born into. I've always been very bad at that.

Why do we hear so little about bisexuality?

It's sort of like the last frontier. No one wants to talk about it, it's super taboo still. I know a lot of women who've led bisexual lives who don't want to be burdened with that label because it's not a nice one. It's a synonym for "slut". We need more people to be out and open and honest and reclaim it. It's been sullied over the years. Porn has not helped. Even I sometimes hate calling myself bisexual, but it's the truth of me. But nowhere else are you defined by the person you are in a relationship with at that moment. It's something I'm really interested in exploring and talking about more in my work.

How do your family feel about your sexuality?

I never came out as anything but bisexual. But I think it's really hard for my family to see that. They all see me as gay. "If you have the choice then why would you choose to break everybody's heart?" I've heard that a lot in my life.

I love the irreverent tone of The Slope, the fact that you show queer women who aren't PC, aren't necessarily great role models.

"We have these really strict boxes of what it is to be gay in the mainstream. We can only be perfect. We can only be Ellen and Portia, or Mitch and Cam from Modern Family, only be these characters without any flaw to attack. But what it is to be human is to be flawed. The whole point of The Slope was to have characters that are flawed and have something other than perfection to show, because otherwise - how is it equal and fair if we can only be perfect? I wish I had a more articulate way of saying it. We neuter gay people and make them "adorable". They're not real people."

How do you feel about LGBT film?

I define queer film as a film that humanises queer characters, and I feel great about any film that does that. There are titles I don't appreciate, or that don't speak to me, but when I was

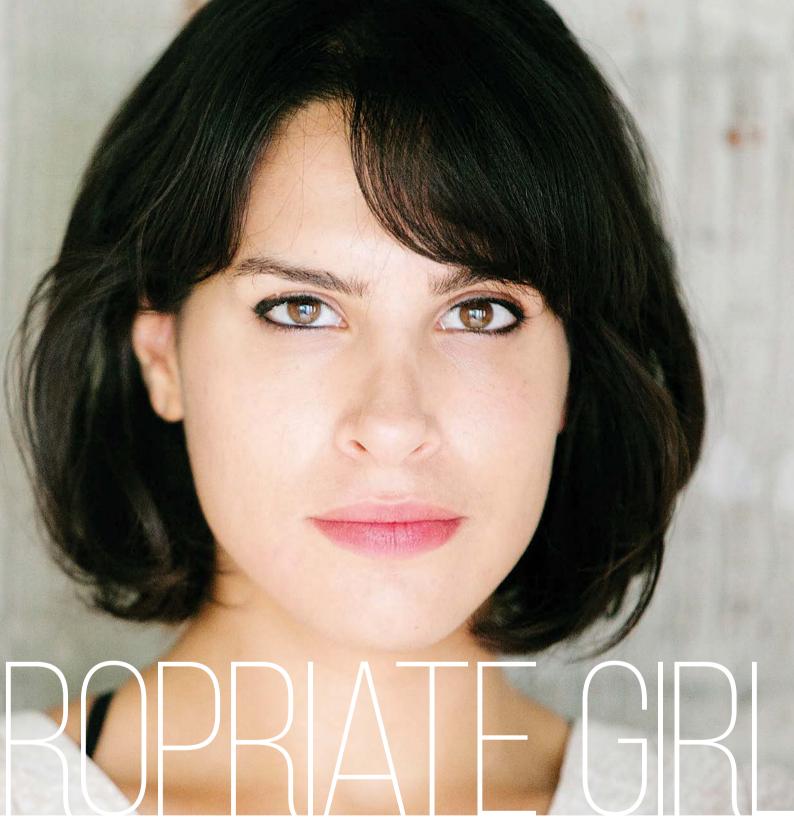




ADDITIONAL

DIGITAL

More information on p5 | divadigital.co.uk



coming out I had the most ferocious desire to watch any narrative of two women in love. It was the only thing that brought me comfort, it was like oxygen and I can't put down something that gave me so much comfort and strength through such a shitty period. So even the shit is good because it speaks to you and it gives you love that no one else is giving you. Every gay person I know has watched LGBT films. It's a common language.

What feedback have you had from the Iranian community?

So far, so good. At every screening I see a community of Iranian people. They've been supportive. Iranians will tell you to your face if they don't like something, and that's sometimes really upsetting. Nothing's ever Iranian enough. I see it at screenings of other Iranian films, people get really angry that it's not their personal experience of being Iranian that's shown.

Similarly, one time a bisexual in San Fran asked in the Q&A "Why isn't this more about bisexuality and why didn't you write about how taboo it is to be bisexual in the LGBT community?" And I was like, "You should make your own film". That wasn't the story. That story should exist, but it's not the one I was telling.

Appropriate Behaviour is in cinemas 6 March. Watch The Slope for free: *theslopeshow.com*.







"AN ENTERTAINING CURIOSITY...

AN ENORMOUS SENSE OF FUN"

**** THE GUARDIAN

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Future Brown (Warp)

Warp quartet Future Brown looks set to hypnotise dance fans with their fine debut. Infused with attitude, sex and sensuality, it swings effortlessly between deep electro, grime and hip-hop. Beautifully produced with distinctive beats and loops, it also features ace vocals from guest rappers including Tink and Maluca.

•••••••••••••••••

DOWNLOAD THIS

AFRICA EXPRESS PRESENTS

Terry Riley's in C Mali (Transgressive)

Brian Eno, Nick Zinner and other Africa Express musicians team up with contemporary Bamako musicians for this tribute to minimalist composer Terry Riley. A reimagining of Riley's seminal In C Minor, it builds and swells with African percussion, balafan and djembe layered over flutes, quitars and melodica. Mesmerising.

IF YOU LIKE FLEET FOXES FATHER JOHN MISTY

I Love You, Honeybear (Bella Union)

Former Fleet Fox, Father John Misty, follows up 2012's Fear Fun with another fantastic album. Chateau Lobby and Honeybear are epic pop songs with anthemic choruses and rich falsetto vocals, whilst Ideal Husband fuses gorgeous West Coast pop-rock with scathing, sarcastic lyrics.





SLEATER-KINNEY

No Cities to Love (Sub Pop)

Ten years after The Woods, feminist trio Sleater-Kinney return with a blistering new album. Price Tag, No Anthems and Bury Our Friends capture Carrie Brownstein and Corin Tucker's angular guitars playing off Janet Weiss's swooping drums, whilst Hey Darling and A New Wave are driven by kinetic pop melodies and post-punk vocals. Elsewhere, SK ventures into hard rock with Brownstein and Tucker hollering over dissonant, furious guitars.



TANYA TAGAQ

Animism (Six Shooter Records)

A former collaborator of Bjork and Kronos Quartet, Tanya Tagaq is an Inuit throat singer who makes intriguing, avant-garde music. Falling somewhere between Diamanda Galas and Owen Pallett, Animalism morphs incredible vocal polymaths with taut strings, eerie electronics and bold percussion. The result is unsettling, compelling and fiercely primal. Listen.



THE DØ

Shake Shook Shaken (Wagram)

A must for fans of Fever Ray, iamamiwhoami and Lykke Li, The Dø's latest album is a swaggering, booty-shaking, synth-pop bomb. All 12 songs last two to four minutes and are propelled forward by shimmering synths, motorik rhythms and Olivia Merilahi's catchy, multi-tracked vocals. Impossible to listen to without dancing/singing along.



WARPAINT & DAUGHTERFeeling Alright / Winter Remixes

DIVA favourites Warpaint and Daughter reconstruct each other's tracks with moody guitars and blissfully ethereal vocals.



Ghost of A Girl EP

Lesbian quartet Sulk marries folk and acoustic pop on this new EP laced with gently-strummed guitars and gorgeously mellow vocal harmonies.



PERFUME GENIUS Fool

Perfume Genius channels the spirit of Twin Peaks on his dreamy single with washed out synths, lovelorn vocals and fingerclicks.





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A B









Dir Richard Glatzer, Wash Westmoreland



Both Julianne Moore and Kristen Stewart are mesmerising in this tearierker, based on a bestselling American novel by Lisa Genova. Moore plays Alice Howland, a 50-year-old linguistics professor with three children, whose high-achieving life is thrown out of kilter as her memory and powers of understanding begin a hurtling decline. The horror of her diagnosis – early onset Alzheimer's – is made clear in some creepy sequences, and Moore's performance is a tour de force, each emotion precisely etched on her face until her features blur with confusion. Kristen Stewart provides tombovish support as Alice's wayward daughter and unexpected lifeline.

In cinemas 6 March

THE FACE OF AN ANGEL

Dir Michael Winterbottom



The 2007 murder of Meredith Kercher and trial of Amanda Knox produced a media sensation, but Michael Winterbottom's film about the case steers away from satisfying prurient curiosity. In this somewhat sprawling meta-movie, film director Thomas Lang (Daniel Brühl) is commissioned to make a true-crime thriller about the two young women but is distracted by the poetry of Dante, mysterious drug-fuelled nightmares and a 21-year-old British waif, Melanie (Cara Delevingne). If you're most intrigued by Cara's transition from model to actress, it's hard to draw conclusions from this girl-next-door performance, but she's key to the movie's take on Meredith's death. In cinemas 27 March

BONLINE



APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Dir Desiree Akhavan

Forget the love of your life; how do you get over the woman who was the love of your 20s? In her debut feature film, Desiree Akhavan writes, directs and stars as Shirin, a bisexual Iranian-American struggling to move on from her ex, come out to her parents and navigate the Brooklyn gay scene on her own. If you've ever wondered what a queer Lena Dunham would come up with, this witty ride through hipster sex and heartbreak might be it. The auteur started out with a web miniseries about "superficial, homophobic lesbians" (theslopeshow.com) but this full-length project has plenty of depth and heart.

In cinemas 6 March | See interview on p28

LGBT FILM PRIZE IRIS PRIZE NOW £30,000

Think there should be more movies about lesbians? Fancy making your own? Submissions are now open for the 2015 Iris Prize, awarded to shorts and feature films by, for and about LGBTI audiences. The prize money has just been upped to £30,000, so get your cameras rolling...

Apply at irisprize.org/submissions

FILM FESTIVAL GLASGOW 2015

Taking over venues across the city, this year's Glasgow Film Festival runs 18 February-1 March (with short films showing 11-15 March). It hosts a rich selection of cinema alongside pop-up events, and LGBT films including Australian drama 52 Tuesdays and Appropriate Behaviour.

Buy tickets and see the full programme at glasqowfilm.org/festival/whats_on

DVD PRIDE

Pride raised rounds of applause in cinemas for its tale of the

1984 alliance between LGBT activists and striking miners. If you still haven't seen this British-made smashhit, take the chance to whoop from your sofa when it comes out on DVD this month. I'm getting it for Mother's Day...
On sale from 2 March



BLOG

TWO BIRDS NEST

Tired of the lack of wedding inspiration in Australia for the LGBT community, Cushla created her blog for real couples to inspire others and to share their own experiences.

twobirdsnest.com

SHOP

MRS AND MRS

If you're looking for lez-exclusive wedding favours or just need a gift, this website offers plenty of cute and quirky products to suit any couple.

mrsandmrsproducts.co.ul

GETTING HITCHED WEDDING

The Gay Wedding Guide has everything you need to plan your wedding. From venues to themes, this website will help you start the rest of your lives.

thegayweddingguide.co.uk



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Gay Wedding Guide





ON THE WEB



Carmilla is the hottest series on the web right now, and if you haven't had a chance to check it out vet, now is the time. Based on the classic gothic novella by J Sheridan LeFanu, sink your teeth in and find out what's got hundreds of thousands of viewers captivated.

NOW FILMING BOY MEETS GIRL

Filming is underway in Manchester for BBC2's heartwarming new romantic comedy, Boy Meets Girl. Touted as the first British comedy to prominently feature transgender characters, Leo (Harry Hepple) feels his run of poor luck is changing when he meets a mysterious older woman, played by Rebecca Root. Denise Welch also stars as Leo's mum, Pam.

ON OUR RADAR **FAMILY FORTUNE**



Tina Fey is producing a "lesbian family comedy" starring the hilarious Fortune Feimster. The semi-autobiographical series, based on Feimster, sees a popular gym teacher coming out to her family and friends, only to realise that they have some coming outs of their own to do.

ACROSS THE ATLANTIC **ONE BIG HAPPY**

Elisha Cuthbert, Nick Zano and Kelly Brook star in a new comedy from Ellen DeGeneres. The series premieres in the US on 17 March but there's no word on a UK air date yet so you'll have to keep waiting to see it here. Legally, anyway.



HOUSE OF CARDS

The critically acclaimed House Of Cards is back, starring Golden Globe winners Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright. We're in Washington once again and the stakes are higher than ever. President Underwood fights to secure his legacy. while Claire wants more than being First Lady, but the biggest threat they face is contending with each other. Based on the BBC miniseries, the Netflix original is back with all-new 4K episodes – that's ultra high definition to you and me.

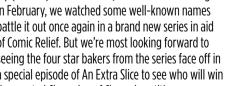
Netflix, 27 February



WHAT WE'RE WATCHING

THE GREAT COMIC RELIEF **BAKE OFF: AN EXTRA SLICE**

What's better than eating cakes? Watching celebrities try (and fail) to make cakes, of course. For four nights in February, we watched some well-known names battle it out once again in a brand new series in aid of Comic Relief. But we're most looking forward to seeing the four star bakers from the series face off in a special episode of An Extra Slice to see who will win the coveted Champion of Champions title.



BBC1, 13 March



WE CAN'T WAIT FOR **GAME OF THRONES**

It's all back to Westeros for the fifth season of the incredible Game of Thrones, and while it'll take a lot to top what's come before, we're excited! Filming for the 10-part series began in July last year, and word is that it'll likely be based on the fourth and fifth novels, A Feast For Crows and A Dance With Dragons respectively. In terms of the plot, speculation and rumour is rife, but we'll stay away from spoilers and wait and see what's in store when GOT hits our screens in April. Sky Atlantic, 13 April, 9pm



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Quote reference





FICTION I AM ALESSIA Persia West

Narrator Michelle has just married nice guy Charlie when she falls hard for her cousin Alessia. West

describes her writing as "often poetic. the mood operatic"; get a free taster by listening to a reading of the first chapters at her website. persiawestwords.net. pb £7.99, e £3.72



THE WELL Catherine Chanter

In a dystopian droughtplaqued Britain, former Londoner Ruth is under house arrest. The plentiful

water supply at her family's miraculous new farm and the identity of a killer are at the heart of this pacey, futuristic literary thriller about family relationships. Canongate, £12.99



FEMINISM/ECONOMICS WHO COOKED ADAM SMITH'S **DINNER?**

Katrine Marçal

This analysis of gender and economics pulls apart

the beliefs unpinning the economics of self-interest that has shaped our deeply unstable, obscenely unequal world and examines women's positions in that system. Translated by Saskia Vogel, Swedish journalist Marcal's argument for change is compelling.

Portobello, £12.99



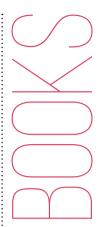
FICTION THE OFFERING

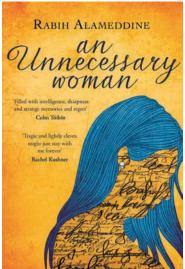
Grace McLean

Incarcerated in a psychiatric institution. Madeline undergoes therapy to help her remember the

events that disrupted her messy rural life at age 14. The truth that she and Dr Lucas slowly uncover will have devastating repercussions. An affecting story. beautifully-told.

Sceptre, £17.99





FICTION

AN UNNECESSARY **WOMAN**

Rabih Alameddine

Each year of her adult life, septuagenarian Aaliva Saleh has begun translating a favourite book into Arabic. stowing the finished manuscripts away unread. From her book-filled Beirut apartment she contemplates literature, philosophy and art and recalls episodes from her life: memories of an unsuccessful arranged marriage, of the Israeli siege of 1982, when she slept with an AK-47 by her side, of her unpleasant half-brothers

and their attempts to take her apartment, and of her 50 years working at a bookstore owned by a relative of her dearest friend Hannah. Aaliva prefers to keep company with her books, avoiding the other women in her apartment block. Now though, as another new year comes around and Aaliya begins to tire, she hesitates about her next project. Then, disaster strikes. Funny, smart, layered, erudite, scathing and sad, An Unnecessary Woman is a fantastic portrait of a solitary, book-loving woman, and of Beirut, "the Elizabeth Taylor of cities". Alameddine's novel is one to savour.

Corsair, £16,99



ROMANCE ELLIE BRAVO

Janet Pywell

Pywell's self-published third novel features largely closeted IT marketing manager Ellie Bravo, Harley-riding Ellie's rebuilding her life when a complicated affair with colleague Maria sets Maria's manipulative husband Michael on the warpath. Will Ellie come out fighting? An enjoyable read. pb £6.11, eBook £2.16



FICTION THE FIRST BAD MAN

Miranda July

July is on superb form with this unusual love story in which dowdy pushover Cheryl Glickman's secret fantasies reveal an inner world that is both profoundly odd and deeply truthful. Her relationships take expected turns in this brilliant, absorbing novel. Loved it.

Canongate, £14.99

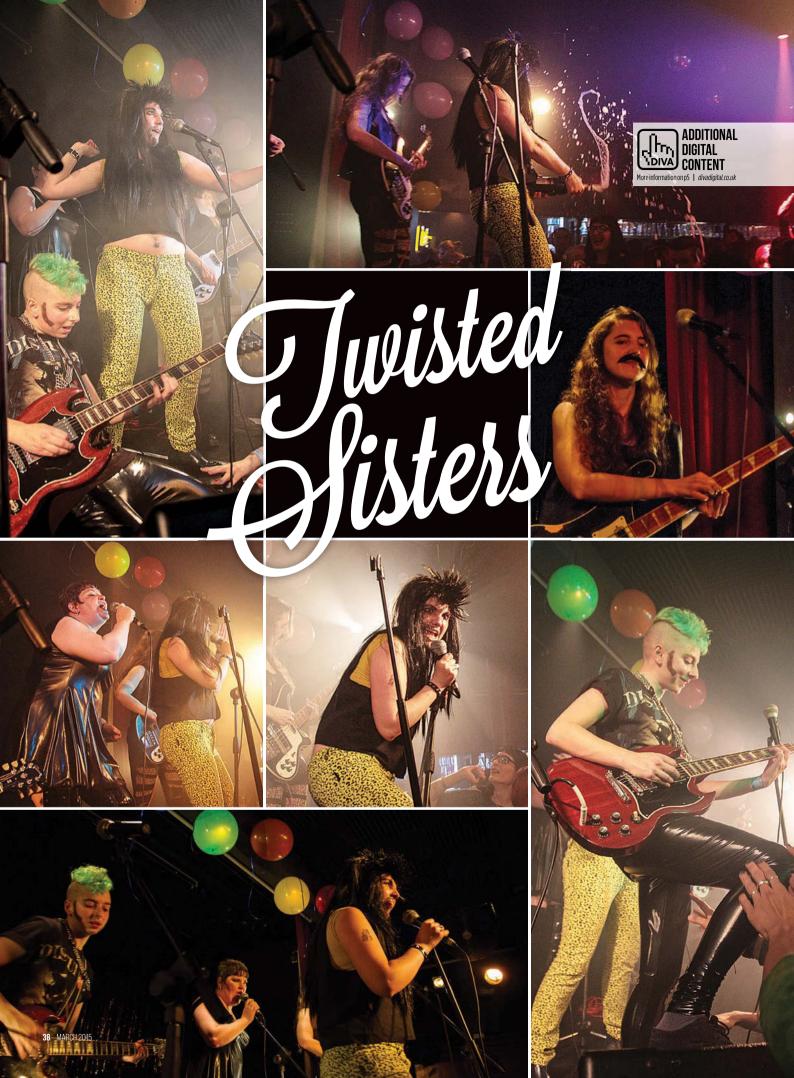


MEMOIR **HOW TO GROW UP**

Michelle Tea

Michelle Tea of lesbian-feminist performance art collective Sister Spit fame has now been 10 years sober, is living somewhere roach-free. and is ready to tell her story. Expect naked roommates, fridge maggots, drugs, lovers, booze and dive-bar poetry readings in this candid memoir.

Plume, £11.99



What do you get when four rock gods (and their backing singer) come together? DIVA finds out...

DIVA: Who are The Dykeness?

THRUSTIN' HAWKINS: We are an electrifying, spandex-stretching, intergalactic super-group made up of the biggest swinging dicks of glam rock. We are Thrustin' Hawkins, Johnny B Wood, Billy-Bob Big Johnson Johnson, Dyck van Dick and Rocktopussy - four strapping young bucks and our fabulous backing singer. Our sources tell us some Earth venues have incorrectly billed us as a "Feminist Comedy Drag Cock Rock band", but that's the insidious work of the Matriarchy.

How and why did The Dykeness

THRUSTIN': We're just four regular

JOHNNY: Hey man, let's just answer some legal trouble (we try not to ask too many questions) and Dyck just

What's your usual repertoire setwise? Covers? Original material?

JOHNNY: We only play original material. Some of our faves are Whole Lotta Love, Breakin The Law, I Believe In A Thing Called Love. They're all balls-out, electrifying, heterosexual anthems. We've had to sue your Earth band The Darkness a few times - they keep ripping us off.

What does an average Dykeness gig involve?

THRUSTIN': I feel like, what we're bringing is an astute social commentary on love, loss and the constraints of physical existence. Audiences normally respond to the band with

DIVA MEETS THE DYKENESS, THE SPANDEX-LOVIN', COCK **ROCK COVERS** BAND FROM **OUTER SPACE** WHO'VE GOT **EARTH BABES** SCREAM-**ING AND SWOONING** INTERVIEW CHARLOTTE

RICHARDSON

ANDREWS

screaming and nudity. In short, we're about glitter, shattering boundaries and soaring heights of intimate physical connection.

JOHNNY: And dick jokes.

Any pre-show rituals?

THRUSTIN': Apart from the silver platters of cocaine, bottled Evian, flocks of doves, painted-pure-white dressing rooms, Jeroboams of champagne, Roctopussy's team of personal masseuses, strictly heterosexual orgies where none of us dudes look at each other's photogenic, glistening bodies as our spandex is slowly stripped away, house-boys that clean the spaceship swimming pool in mandatory blue sparkly thongs... we're actually pretty low maintenance.

Do you feel a kinship with other queer feminist rock covers bands, such as Lez Zepplin and Vag Halen?

[Thrustin' and Johnny confer] THRUSTIN': [gravely] Listen, I don't know who you think we are. JOHNNY: We don't take kindly to that kind of language. We have nothing to do with these so-called "queers". THRUSTIN': And you should research your music history before you do these kinds of interviews, you've spelled both those bands' names wrong. It's actually LAD Zeppelin and MAN Halen, both all-guy, legs wide apart, hetero-erotic, cock-rocking covers acts who we very much admire, despite the fact that we in The Dykeness only play original songs that we definitely composed ourselves, from

A lot of cock rock - and rock, in general - is historically loaded with misogyny. "Woman ain't got no soul" etc. What happens when a bunch of queer feminists appropriate these songs?

scratch, for real.

JOHNNY: What's a "queer feminist"? THRUSTIN': It's some kind of winter cold Hot Earth Babes get.

JOHNNY: Oh no. That sounds serious. THRUSTIN': Ok look, the thing is women have no souls. It's a Scientifically Proven Fact. And women have got all het up about some kind of patriarchal conspiracy. This is a myth. We need to name the real problem: The Matriarchy.

People tend to be surprised and shocked when I tell them I enjoy cock rock in a non-ironic way. Why do men feel so threatened by women who love a good, guitarwanking solo?

THRUSTIN': Because these ignorant men don't deserve a Hot Earth Babe like you!

JOHNNY: If Dyck was here, he would probably say something along the lines of, "Men deliberately exclude women from their homo-social (and secretly homo-erotic) cultural spaces, in which they bond through shared behaviours like phallocentrism, masculinity worship and misogyny". But he's not here, so, I'm gonna agree with Thrustin' on this one.

Rock can be problematic, but a lot of it is also inherently, historically queer. For all the swagger, noise and machismo, it's also a space where performers such David Bowie, Alice Cooper, Joan Jett and Suzi Quattro have used fashion, drag, androgyny and performance to queer things up, play with gender and blur the binary. Do you see The Dykeness performing in this tradition?

THRUSTIN': We're outside of any pre-existing music tradition. **JOHNNY:** In some ways we invented

THRUSTIN': Even I'll admit we didn't invent music, but we did invent guitar-based rock.

The dynamic between cock rock bands and their fans is also pretty loaded. Lez Zepplin have talked about the queer dynamic at work when cis, heterosexual [cishet] men gather en masse to worship at the stage of other cishet men. Is cock rock inherently queer?

JOHNNY: Listen, there is nothing more inherently, wholesomely heterosexual than cock rock. We're just a group of bros, hanging out in a gang, spending time together, making music, wearing spandex together, thrusting our crotches into male audience members' faces, rubbing each other down after shows **O**

facebook.com/thedykeness

coalesce?

guys making meaningful music about how hard it is to be a dude. If you need to ask why, then I'm sorry but political correctness has gone too far.

the question. So, I needed a strong, male role-model to make sure I didn't become an independent bread-winner like my mother, and had been following Thrustin' around without meeting any. Then Thrustin' found Billy Bob under the pool table of a space truck stop bar, Rocktopussy was escaping needs something to keep him busy while he's on sabbatical from his eighth PhD.

to sue The Darkness a few times - they keep ripping us

"We've had





Mythologies abound when feminists and lesbians are the subject matter being discussed. Radical feminism, argues Finn Mackay, is surrounded by lies and myths that tarnish the movement; and in her new book, Radical Feminism, she attempts to set the record straight on its continuing power and relevance.

I'm old enough to be somewhat comforted by the simplicity of its arguments. That, I think, is the lasting appeal of radical feminism: its straightforward analysis of men versus women; patriarchy's sex war ignited by the pervasiveness of gender-based violence. It appeals at a gut level.

Mackay's book is about the present as much as the past, where young feminists are taking a lead in the struggles for social justice on their own terms. Definitions and labels are conceptualised with more fluidity these days, a case of more labels not less, perhaps. A post-modern-influenced anarchic and intersectional approach to activism is challenging the "old guard". Yet, there is an ever-greater need to collectively organise against violence, not just individual but statesanctioned violence, in these times of war, displacement and refugeeism. Belonging never mattered more and having allies from any activist aim including trans as well as cis feminists - seems particularly necessary for the women's liberation movement.

That said, activism is at the heart of this book. It traces the history of the rad fem movement and the inception of the Reclaim The Night marches that began in 1977. As a deft overview of past and present feminist activism and its challenges, it's a thorough piece of work. I asked the lifelong feminist activist, academic and founder of the London Feminist Network for some answers about radical feminist activism.

DIVA: Many people would argue that radical feminism is history and that it isn't relevant to present-day concerns. What is its relevance now?

FINN MACKAY: Feminism remains relevant because sexism hasn't gone away, patriarchy has not gone away. We live in a male-dominated society, one where women are drastically underrepresented in positions of power, legally, politically, financially. This imbalance contributes to the epidemic levels of violence we see against women and children, to the

feminisation of poverty and, I believe, to the environmental destruction and increasing militarisation in our world, which raises questions for all of us. I think that some of the answers we need can be found in radical feminist theory and politics. [It] doesn't shy away from pointing out that male dominance is a problem, it is not afraid of being called "anti-men".

You say that the key question for feminism is "what is a woman?" This is a highly contentious issue. How do you define "woman"?

I think what I'm trying to get across in the book is that this question of what a woman is has become a key question for feminism, particularly in the context of queer theory and third wave feminism. I think that in actual fact it can sometimes be a red herring because while academics sit around and ponder how we might define this term "woman", women's rights are under attack and are being rolled back. It is this latter threat that I am most interested in working on and directing attention towards.

I have a difficult relationship with this term, as I think many lesbians do. Not because we are all postmodern philosophers, but because many lesbians don't feel a connection to what we understand as being "girly" or being "feminine". Our culture presents such narrow versions of what it means to be a woman. I see "woman" as a political term and a political category. I identify as a woman because I belong to the political sex class of women.

The research participants in your book, by your own admission, are predominantly white and there aren't many lesbians. Do you accept that radical feminism doesn't speak to black and minority ethnic women? No, I don't accept that, I just think that I'm not the best person to speak for black feminism! There are many black feminists who describe themselves as or who identify with radical feminism. Patriarchy harms all women, and male violence against women knows no borders of race or class. Here, in this country, the feminist movement is white-dominated and it is right that the movement continues to address that and aims to be inclusive and representative, although that remains an aspirational target.

FINN MACKAY'S **NEW BOOK** SETS OUT TO PROVE THAT **RADICAL FEMINISM IS** STILL FIT FOR **PURPOSE WORDS** ALENA DIFRICKX

Patriarchy, or the gender order, is present for sure, but power is operating in complex ways, such as in same-sex violence. You do acknowledge this in your book but how do you explain this and challenge it? It is important people recognise that many feminists have long been addressing same-sex domestic abuse. Feminists like Professor Marianne Hester, for example, from the Centre for Gender and Violence Research at the University of Bristol. It is not the case that feminists have ignored this issue; in fact, they have pioneered work on it. Racial hate crime doesn't affect as many white people as black people. Rape doesn't affect

as many men as women. So violence

is heavily gendered, but that doesn't

mean that women are not violent or

women, or children.

that women do not abuse men, or other

Tragically, the model of power in patriarchy is a model of force over others; it is a model of control and domination. It is no surprise that people of all sexes adopt this model and gain power by dominating others, especially others less powerful than them, or especially others they feel they can take their power away from. We don't have models of power where power is something people share together, and use for common good.

Does radical feminism take into account problematic masculinised female behaviour? Types of masculinity rather than men are problematic, don't you think?

In the book I argue that it is patriarchy that is the problem, not every individual man or woman. If I believed that men were naturally and biologically violent, aggressive, war-mongering and abusive then there wouldn't be much point in feminism as a social movement. The whole point of feminism is that change is possible, that all of us, men and women, can change for the better. Ours is not a fatalistic or biologically essentialist movement.

The understandings of masculinity, the current models of masculinity that are available are indeed often unhealthy and damaging. Unfortunately, for some women who identify as masculine, or identify with masculinity, and want to be seen as masculine, it can seem tempting to adopt and display the most recognisable and visible elements of masculinity, and those are often

the most obnoxious elements! We all probably know, or have met, women who make sexist statements, or women who objectify women in an aggressive and offensive way. I think also, in a more psychological sense, that there is a certain allure to, however temporarily, inhabiting the role of the ruling class, of putting oneself in a position of dominance and copying the model of power we see around us. Indeed, constructs of masculinity must be challenged and changed, in fact the whole gender order as it currently stands is a problem for us all and ultimately we must seek to move beyond it.

You don't define as queer and are critical of third wave feminism and queer politics because it obscures sex-based inequalities. But in the end you say biology matters in keeping women-only spaces, for those born biologically female, that is. Why is this so important for you and doesn't radical feminism obscure the complexities of power relations?

I don't think radical feminism obscures the realities of power relations, the fact that it focuses on one of the most brutal and base power relations of them all - patriarchy - does not mean that it is ignorant of all the others. Feminism of all kinds has addressed class oppression, racism, lesbian oppression, discrimination against disabled people, because women are not just women, they are a multitude of other identities and that intersects with sex discrimination. To me feminism is socialist, it is anti-racist and anti-imperialist. I don't think any progressive social justice movement cannot be these things.

In the book, within a discussion of women-only space, I do argue that women assigned female at birth who identify as female and as women do have a political right to self-organisation. I don't actually think this should be seen as contentious or radical, all oppressed groups have the right to self-organisation. There is nothing wrong with creating safe spaces around a particular oppressed identity and the experience of that identity. We need all angles on patriarchy if we are to know how to take it apart. •

Finn Mackay's Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism In Movement is on sale now priced £14.99

"Feminism remains relevant because sexism hasn't gone awav"



How to be a trans ally

ransgender people are just everywhere now and, chances are, you probably know one. Or will do at some point. We're here to stay. Now, I know you're super polite and all, and I also happen to know that a lot of people who aren't trans mean well when it comes to the trans people in their lives, but, honey, despite what your grandma may have told you at Christmas, it's not the thought that counts. We all need to start getting better at this sort of thing - just as our straight pals are in the process of learning how to be better allies, too.

Well, fear not, for who better to give you top tips on how to be a trans ally, than me, Paris Lees, top of the trans pops? If this helpful guide doesn't help you become the awesome trans ally you were always meant to be, nothing will. Here we go!

LISTEN

Pretty much every trans person I asked agreed that listening was THE most important thing you can do if you want to support trans people. I'm not saying that you have to listen to them rabbiting on about the price of milk (it's cheaper than bottled water now, don't you know), but when someone is telling you something about how they feel as a trans person, take notes. They know more about it than you.

DON'T BE AN ASSHOLE

Like listening, this is just good advice in general. Ok, so you're a bit surprised to learn that the hottie you were talking to on Dattch happens to be trans. If

that freaks you out, fine, but that's your issue, and certainly not an excuse to be rude. Back out politely, if you must. And don't go around telling everyone that your new pal Rachel is trans - unless she wants you to. Don't gossip about your new workmate because you think they "look" trans, whatever that means. Don't ask someone if their tits/hair/genitals are "real". Unless you're already in a genitals-based relationship, in which case, probe away (and lucky you!).

THINK ABOUT YOUR QUESTIONS

Which leads me neatly on to questions. Trans people get fuckloads of stupid questions and "compliments". A colleague once asked me, "How do you get your legs so smooth?" before telling me, "You sound so much like a woman!" with a look of amazement on her face. I get that she was trying to be nice, but a good rule of thumb is this: would you ask or say this question to a "regular" woman? Or man? If not, it's probably best to sit on it.

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

A lot of people worry when they meet a trans person for the first time, precisely because they don't want to offend. It's usually pretty obvious how someone wishes to be perceived, so, even if you think you can "tell" that someone "used to be a man", if she's presenting as female now, you have to respect that. Because basic human decency. If you're not sure if they prefer "he" or "she", just ask. Trust me, most trans people will be grateful you took the time to enquire. It's not always

IT'S NOT THAT **DIFFICULT** TO SUPPORT TRANS PEOPLE **WORDS** PARIS LEES

clear, and asking is better than getting it wrong. If you slip up - no sweat, just apologise (briefly) and move on. No point making a big deal out of it. Seriously, like you, we'd rather just forget it ever happened.

CHALLENGE BIGOTRY

Ok so, you're wonderful – but one of your pals on Facebook is making transphobic jokes about a trans woman's appearance. And you say nothing. Fuck that! Trans people aren't going to eradicate bigotry on our own. We need your help. If you see someone humiliating trans people simply for being trans, call them out on it, pronto. Ya heard? (And here's a list of no-no words to look out for. If you're not trans it's not funny and you can't use 'em: "shemale", "tranny", "he-she", "shim" and "it". "Ladyboy" is probably better off avoided too, to be on the safe side.)

CHILL OUT!

I know this all sounds like hard work, and my final suggestion may seem contradictory, but you really do need to chill out. It's fine. Some people are trans. You don't have to sit there obsessing over it. It's not actually something you really need to think about, so long as you've got the basics covered, like how to refer to someone. There is no need, though, to be any more hyper-aware of someone's transness than there is for your straight mates to be tip-toeing around your gayness. We're all just people and we'd be a lot happier if we focused on the more important things in life, the joys that unite us. Like Ellen Page. And pizza. **©**

Trans people get loads of stupid questions and "compliments"



16/10/14 Self Portrait

Every 1 January, Jane Moore makes a New Year's Resolution. "They normally consist of giving up chocolate or starting a new sport and I stick to them until about March," she laughs. "In January 2014, I decided to make a resolution that I would be dedicated to and that was to keep a Sketch A Day journal." And a sketch a day she did, A5-size in a Moleskine sketchbook, even when feeling ill or meeting impending work deadlines.

With a degree in Fashion Promotion and Illustration and some distinguished clients to her name (i-D magazine, RSA Films, Barclaycard and the Royal Academy of Arts, to name but a few), the fashion influence is apparent in Moore's drawings, including, for ex-

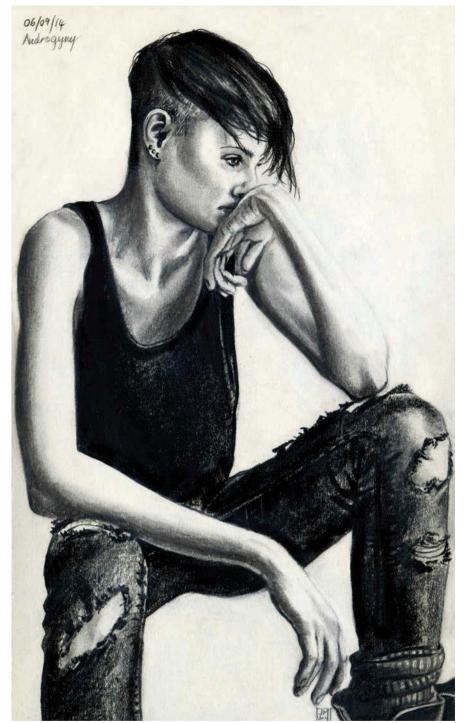
ANNA MCNAY DISCOVERS HOW A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION EVENTUALLY LED TO AN EXHIBITION ample, 26/08/14: Piers Atkinson Cherry Headband (pictured overleaf). "I used to work with Piers in the fashion team of Disorder magazine before he became a superstar milliner," says Moore. "I am a great admirer of his work and I knew the red cherries would look fantastic against the graphite."

There are many other sources of inspiration, however, taken from everyday surroundings, current jobs, current affairs, public figures, family, a life drawing class, books and theatre. Androgyny and gender identity also feature heavily.

Moore recently held a successful exhibition of her sketches at Shapes, Hackney Wick. She also took part in the Winter Pride Visual Arts Awards last November and her works were among those stolen during the ceremony at Tobacco Dock. "It was really upsetting," she admits. "I put my heart and soul into the drawings and they were seven of my best, including my self-portrait (above). Hopefully the thieves will do the right thing and return them. I don't want to prosecute, I would just like my artworks back as they mean so much to me. However, I haven't let it affect my work. I took it as a bizarre compliment and continued on with the project!" In fact, Moore has now decided to continue sketching daily throughout 2015 as well. Watch this space! •

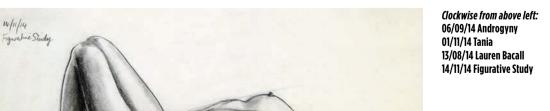
sketchadayproject.com

| PORTFOLIO | JANE MOORE |









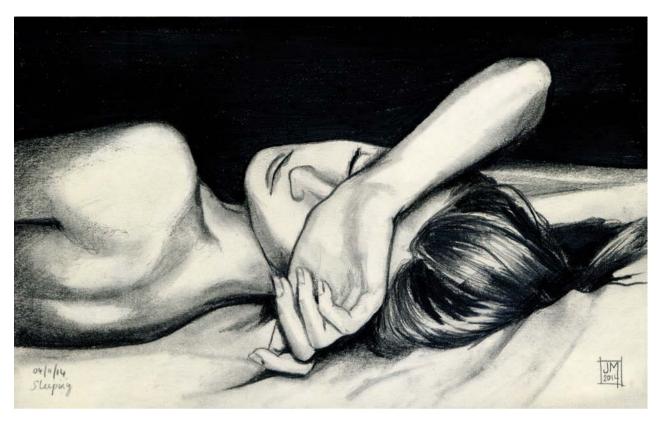
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| PORTFOLIO | JANE MOORE |



Left: 26/08/14 Piers Atkinson Cherry Headband

Opposite, clockwise from top: 04/11/14 Sleeping 02/01/15 Seated Nude 08/01/15 Figure Looking Back







As a rabbi and a member of the LGBTQ community, people are never shy about telling me that organised religion is the source of much pain in the world. They often do not wish to be affiliated with such groups, and ground their ethics in more humanist principles. For so many LGBTQ folk, our experiences within a religious community have been traumatic, and we have been forced out or have chosen to leave. From a broader perspective, many of the national and international conflicts in our world are affected by the political power of religious institutions, and we have not yet discovered the solutions to such problems. Why then might I dare to consider that one path to those solutions may still be found within mainstream Judaism?

I believe that God and religion are separate entities. God, if God exists, is God; and religion is a system created by humans to explain the unexplainable and give meaning to our lives. Commandments and other laws create a moral foundation designed to guide individuals and communities. They should protect us from the worst of ourselves, and encourage us towards the best of ourselves. However, these rules are not immutable. They were designed by humans and may therefore be changed by humans as we learn and grow.

How many of us have tried to improve our lives through diets and/ or fitness programmes? We know from personal experience how hard it is to make such changes. We struggle to find the discipline and stamina that

are needed to persevere. We know how easily and quickly we can lose what it took so much effort to gain. It is generally understood that physical health and strength are important elements of a good life. Does not spiritual fitness also need an exercise manual? Should we not take the time and energy to work on our characters as well? This is where I begin when looking at the laws and stories in the Torah.

In the book of Genesis (1:27), the first human beings are created b'tselem elohim, in the image of God. Each one of us therefore, exactly as we are, no matter how different we may be to others, is made in the image of God. Across the spectrum, whoever we feel called to be, and whoever we feel drawn to love; we are created to be that person, made in the image of God. Anyone who tells us otherwise has not understood these holy words.

From this perspective I read the Torah and understand that Judaism is about relationships. At its centre is the concept of Covenant, modelled by the relationship between God and the Jewish people. The heart of this has nothing to do with dominance by the more powerful and subservience of the less powerful. It is about a loving reciprocal partnership between a couple who choose to commit to a life together. It is about how to traverse the challenges posed by human nature and the temptations of the world as we travel along the road. The commandments of the Torah are guidelines that teach me about how to be



in relationship with myself, those I love, those I do not love; my employers, my co-workers and strangers; all other sentient beings and the living earth that feeds and shelters us.

What then of those Biblical teachings that have been used to attack the LGBTQ community and justify our exclusion from several religious groups? Again, this is a misinterpretation of the text. The forbidding of male same-sex intercourse in Leviticus 18:22 refers to cultic practices of the neighbouring Canaanite religion at the time when the Israelite religion was forming. It defines ritual behaviour in community worship. It is introduced in verse three with a clear command forbidding the Israelites to behave like Canaanites. And even if nearly 3000 years ago it may have been understood in another way, as our society evolves, so do our interpretations of these texts. Exodus 21 states that a child who curses or hits a parent should be executed. Do any Judeo-Christian communities still believe this to be appropriate? Of course not. While appreciating this focus on the perpetual issue of an unruly child, our society has evolved beyond the mind-set that sees death as an appropriate response. These are rules that were written by humans, and have been changed by humans.

Having come to this understanding, is there any practical application of it that may make a difference in our society? I believe that Progressive Judaism walks the walk. In 2005 Liberal Judaism became the first-ever religious movement to publish a liturgy

for same-sex commitment ceremonies. It was also, alongside the Quakers and Unitarians, in the vanguard that fought for and achieved equal marriage legislation in the UK in 2013. Influenced by this, we can see changes beginning to take place across the spectrum of Jewish denominations in this country. The Movement for Reform Judaism began conducting same-sex ceremonies in 2011 and declared its support for equal marriage in 2012. In October 2014 the Masorti movement said yes to samesex partnership ceremonies. As for the Orthodox end of the spectrum, while they are still a long way from public affirmation of such a change in perspective, there is certainly more tolerance and understanding to be found privately in families and some communities. Our journey continues through Liberal Judaism's support of such projects as Twilight People: Stories Of Gender And Faith Beyond The Binary, as we begin our work with transgender Jews and reach out to unite with other faith communities.

Twenty-five years ago the first out lesbians were ordained as rabbis in London. Ten years ago our rabbis began to celebrate same-sex commitment ceremonies. In 2015 a national Jewish newspaper has a regular column by a transgender person that describes the process and issues of transition. I believe that Judaism is one of the most progressive religions in the UK. There is much still to be achieved, but organised religion can and must play its part in the healing of our world.

Judaism is one of the most progressive religions in the UK

What a picture,

SOME PICTURES SAY A THOUSAND WORDS – HERE ARE THE STORIES BEHIND THESE

You don't have to hire a photographer at all. These days almost all your guests will own smart-phones or digital cameras and sometimes the loveliest wedding photos are those taken by people who know you intimately. But if you want your pictures to be a souvenir of your special day, it's worth looking for a skilled professional, who will meet you in advance to talk about the kind of photos you want and do the research to make sure they capture the true essence of the day.









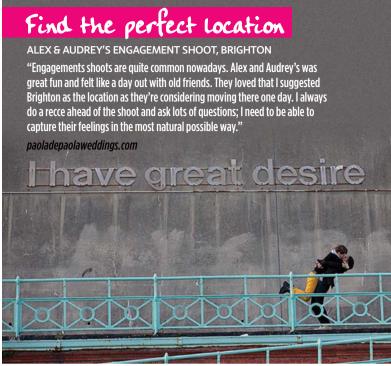




REBECCA & JOANNA'S WEDDING, LONDON ZOO

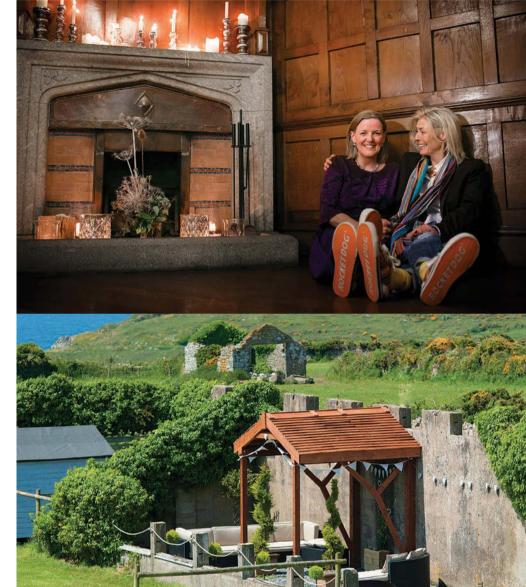
"This was a truly incredible moment. There was a bit of a kerfuffle as the keepers were worried that Maggie the giraffe would swallow the pin holding Rebecca's buttonhole, which obviously presented a nice alternative to her daily diet, but Maggie was determined. Rebecca's expression crowns it all."

inthepinkphotography.com





DIVA SCOURED THE COUNTRY FOR THE MOST UNIQUE WEDDING VENUES IN THE UK, HERE THEY ARE...



BOHO CORNWALL

BoHo Cornwall is a specialist elopement venue, offering a personal and romantic experience for couples who want their wedding day to be truly meaningful, and Maya and Tom Conway passionate about working with you to create an intimate, private and elegant ceremony that's all about the two of you. Run away with the one you love for a truly romantic adventure with no fuss, no stress and nothing but true romance.

In autumn or winter, opt for a candle-lit ceremony in the oak-panelled hall, the fire crackling in the stone fireplace, your own tailor-made playlist as the soundtrack. Or, if the weather is kind, marry in the walled garden en plein air, barefoot if that's what you fancy. The wedding arbour is strung with crisp white bunting and fairy-lights, its walls hung with pretty wooden hearts. Striking architectural topiary and contemporary outdoor so-fas create the perfect romantic space to make your vows.

Boho Cornwall will help you create your perfect elopement, working with local suppliers to make planning stress-free and easy. They'll even organise a classic car to whisk you along the stunning scenic coastal road for a foodie treat at the renowned Gurnard's Head, or a romantic catered and chauffeured champagne picnic in a '59 vintage British camper van. Or maybe you'd rather curl up by the fire with a BoHo deli-platter and champagne and watch the sun sink into the Atlantic Ocean? Your wish is their command.

Ochre and Umber are boutique-hotel style hideaway retreats, with luxurious touches – four-poster bed, rainfall shower, roll-top bath, Tri-Dosha toiletries, wood-burning stove and soulful views. So what are you waiting for? Run away to the end of the earth and tie the knot in utter seclusion. bohocornwall.co.uk

PHOTO EVELYNE SANSOT / IN THE PINK, LARA LUZ, GRW PHOTOGRAPHY, REBECC

OVER THE RAINBOW, WALES

If you're looking for a secluded rural venue, this one is for you. Over The Rainbow is an award-winning vegetarian guest-house near the idyllic Cardigan Bay, home to stunning blue flag beaches and bottle-nosed dolphins.

This lesbian-run venue, which has hosted more than 25 civil partnerships, prides itself on providing a safe and welcoming space for gay couples in the heart of the Welsh countryside.

The house itself is a restored Georgian mansion set in 18 acres of garden and woodland with five bedrooms uniquely decorated to

reflect female myths and legends from around the world, including Queen Nefertiti and Goddess Oya. They can accommodate 10 people overnight, and 40 for weddings in their ballroom.

Over The Rainbow has received a gold standard award from the Green Tourism Association for its commitment to being an ethical and environmentally responsible venue, and even grow their own produce for their inventive and varied menu.

overtherainbowwales.co.uk



6 TIPS FOR CHOOSING THE RIGHT WEDDING VENUE

BY MS LUZ-VEGAS OF F* YEAH GAY WEDDINGS, FYEAHGAYWEDDINGS.COM

Barns, halls, backyards, gardens, estate houses, bars, restaurants, beaches, function centres, churches, hotels, rooftops, art spaces, warehouses, deserted islands, forests, temples, tipis in a field... the list of possible wedding venues is endless! But how do you choose the best fit for your celebration? We've come up with six tips to help you choose the right venue for you and your soon-to-be partner in crime. F yeah!

KEEN ON A THEME

Choosing a theme for your wedding does not just mean choosing a colour palette or fancy dress era. Having a theme can also help with the type of ambiance that you want your wedding to have and therefore your venue type – eg relaxed, outdoors, classic, traditional or even circus!

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!

Have you considered having your ceremony, photos and reception all in the one venue? Having everything in the one place will save you soooooo much time! You won't be wasting any precious photo or partying time commuting back and forth AND it will also spare your guests the hassle of driving between venues or having to amuse themselves while they

wait for you, they can just go ahead and get the party started! Keeping everything in the one spot makes for a super relaxed and easy day for everyone!

THE INS AND OUTS

So you've chosen your venue and you are about to drop the deposit, but what about the extras?

- Additional time will you be charged an extra fee if you go overtime? What about extra hours of bar service? Is there a cut-off time? Are there noise restrictions in the neighbourhood?
- Set up/pack down times can you set up the day before or pack down the day after, so you're not sleepily pulling down decorations in your wedding gear at midnight?





PURPOSE-BUILT ceremony venue. GLASS-FRONTED reception suite. Uninterrupted, STUNNING views of the Atlantic Ocean and Lundy Island. Our own team of aWard-Winning CHEFS. Five-star LUXURY accommodation. EVERYTHING IN ONE PLACE. Totally UNIQUE.



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north devon coastal wedding & civil partnership venue

OCEAN KAVE, DEVON

Individuality, flexibility, freedom and personalisation are the crux of an Ocean Kave wedding.

Nestled on the cliff tops above Mermaids Pool within 60 acres of private grounds on the North Devon coast, this stunning destination has unrivalled views across the Atlantic, and proudly wears the crown of the TWIA Best South West Countryside Wedding Venue 2015.

With a dedicated team of wedding planners working tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that each wedding at Ocean Kave is completely unique and bespoke, Ocean Kave provide a one-to-one service that goes above and beyond your dreams and expectations.

Kathy Murdoch, director of Ocean Kave says: "We pride ourselves on offering lesbian couples a truly bespoke service, as the venue enables brides to enjoy the freedom of a blank canvas to create their vision, including the bridal entrance, catering and styling.

"No two weddings are ever the same at Ocean Kave and everything is possible."

oceankave.co.uk







6 TIPS FOR CHOOSING THE RIGHT WEDDING VENUE (CONT)

- Parking, accessibility, public transport considered bussing in your guests so they don't drink and drive?
- Wedding coordinator / staff does your venue include an "on-the-day coordinator" to help keep things running smoothly and ensure you get fed on time?
- WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD?!

Speaking of getting fed, choosing the right venue also has a lot to do with the types of menu options available. Thinking about the style of menu you would like can also help you decide on the venue itself:

- Buffet or spit roast = old homestead in the country
- Dad's barbecue = relaxed backyard wedding

- Family-style platters = cosy town hall
- Roaming cocktail or hors d'oeuvres = funky art space
- Traditional sit-down dinner = classic function centre or restaurant

Also factor in whether you will need to bring in caterers or if the venue has in-house food service. Don't forget to do a taste test to make sure everything is as delicious as you hoped!

NOT NOW, MOTHER NATURE

So you think you've found your perfect outdoor spot for your ceremony... and then the sky opens up and it thrashes down. Eek! Sometimes a few spare umbrellas just won't cut it, so make sure you also have a wet weather option — even if it's just shifting your ceremony indoors, under a tent

or sheltering in a stable!

LIGHT 'EM UP!

When it's all said and done, the one thing you have left after your wedding day are your photos, so keep them in mind when choosing your venue. A dimly-lit dungeon may seem like a rad wedding story, but your photos will suffer for it! Turn off the fluorescent lights, string up a few fairy lights or lanterns, set up a few lamps or uplights onto the walls and hey, suddenly you've created atmosphere, your guests can see what they're eating AND your photos will be gorgeous. Lighting can turn an average space into a magical wonderland!

Want to know more? Send in your questions to hello@ fyeahgayweddings.com.







NOT SURE WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR WEDDING **OUTFIT AFTER** THE BIG DAY? MEET THE **COUPLE WHO FOUND A CREATIVE WAY** TO GET RID OF **THEIRS WORDS CARRIE LYELL**

Laura and Chrissy McCullough spent months trying to find the perfect dresses for their wedding in November 2013. "In the end, mine was handmade," says Laura.

The couple spent £500 each making sure they felt the part for their big day. But when photographer Paloma offered them a "trash the dresses" shoot, the couple jumped at the chance. "The dresses were only going to sit in a box," Laura says. "And it felt amazing seeing Chrissy in her dress again. It made my heart skip a beat."

> A little nervous at first, they headed to the beach. But as soon as the neon paints started flying, there was no looking back.

"The pictures are incredible," says Laura. "More than I could have ever imagined."

they give to other couples wanting to do something similar? "You both need to be 100% comfortable and wanting to

What advice would do it. It' so much fun. Let your hair down and enjoy every second." •































feel like I blinked and six months has gone by. I guess that's what happens when you take such a huge leap and create such a shift in your own life," says Vicky Beeching, when I ask how life has been since she came out publicly as a lesbian last August, aged 35.

Her voice on the end of the phone is bright with the excitement and wonder she clearly feels. Coming out is often an exhilarating experience but few travel the rollercoaster ride Beeching has been on since the declaration of her sexuality made headline news last summer.

A star of the Christian music scene since her 20s, Vicky's songs were until recently amongst the most-sung on any given Sunday in American churches. The revelation that she is gay effectively ended this career but there have been many unforeseen gifts along the way, as she told DIVA from Washington, DC, where she is currently based.

What did she expect when she decided to go public? "I didn't really know what to expect. I wasn't able to imagine life on the other side of that decision, so coming out was a real mixture of terror and hope," she answers.

The response was immediate and

FORMER CHRISTIAN ROCK STAR VICKY **BEECHING TELLS LOUISE CAROLIN HOW COMING OUT LED TO HER NEW ROLE AS AN ADVISOR TO** THE UNITED **NATIONS**

Christians have told me that this is a gamechanger for them'

overwhelming; her exclusive interview with journalist Patrick Strudwick ran on the front page of The Independent and the same night she debated with anti-gay campaigner Scott Lively live on Channel 4 News. The story went viral; her online interview with DIVA (tinyurl.com/DIVAVickyB) was one of the most-read stories on our website for months.

Reactions were mixed - the "vitriol and nastiness" tempered by "incredible love and support," she remembers. "It was amazing to see a lot of Christians showing that love in a way I had hoped they would but wasn't sure about."

Now that the dust has settled, the positive responses far outnumber the negative. "I've had lots and lots of Christians get in touch with me and say that reading my story has changed their minds. So that has been the thing that makes it all worth it; to hear pastors, churches, Christians saying, 'This has been a game-changer for us'. That was my real hope and I'm delighted that it's happened."

Nevertheless, coming out has irrevocably changed her life. As a Christian singer-songwriter, Beeching performed her songs for the vast congregations of the evangelical megachurches but since August these bookings have dried up. "It is really scary to take a step that means you could lose your

livelihood," she admits. "I have been in conversation with people who used to book me for events in America within those Christian contexts and they've said that that's not an option any more, that I'm now deemed unbookable because no megachurch or Christian conference would want me."

And yet her relationship with those audiences has given her a unique connection to a population whom many assume are beyond the reach of gay rights messages.

"They're not inclusive in their theology, so they would not accept gay people," Beeching explains. "[But] I am more acceptable to them - by a small margin! - because they know my life. They know the good I've done, they know how I've served the church both in the US and the UK through my singing and my worshipping and my songwriting. So there is a slight crack in the door."

When she spoke about coming out for the first time in the US recently, as a keynote speaker at the Gay Christian Network Conference in Portland, Oregon, the online video of her speech received over 15,000 hits in seven days.

Now Beeching is working with American LGBT rights groups and the United Nations to engage with conservative Christians around the subject of sexual diversity on their





home ground. Later this year she'll be journeying back to some of the most conservative states and cities to share her story.

"I'm a little nervous about that because there is a lot of homophobia and violence in those parts of America," she tells me. "But I think it's important, really for the sake of young people. That's my main driving force. Young people that have to wrestle with their identity in those conservative contexts. If I could be in their area and tell my story, maybe it will give them hope."

Once, Beeching herself was one of those kids, albeit growing up in Kent not Arkansas. While she has nothing but praise for her conservative Christian family, her early life was clearly traumatic – she has told of her deep isolation, attributing her academic success (she studied theology at Oxford University) to the fact that she had no life outside school work, as well as her heartbreaking efforts to overcome her sexual orientation, even submitting to "deliverance ministry", a process akin to exorcism.

She came out privately to her family a few months before her public declaration and says that the time taken "as a family, to talk and journey with it" has proven invaluable in enabling them to reach a place of acceptance.

"Even though they don't agree with me about what the Bible says, they are "It is frustrating tomewhen straight Christians aren'fable to see theirown privilege"

able to surrender that to God and love and celebrate me anyway. There's this great Billy Graham quote that says, it's God's job to judge, the Holy Spirit's job to convict and it's my job to love. I think as Christians we sometimes get our job descriptions muddled up; we think it's God's job to love and our job to judge!

"My family, especially my 90-yearold grandpa, who's been a preacher and a pastor all his life, very conservative, he's been able to embrace that quote and let God do the judging and just celebrate me, so now they've all come to a place of being very proud. They watch everything I do, they all listened to my GCN keynote online and they're all delighted about the UN stuff. I feel like it's a miracle actually; I can't believe the love and support that I'm receiving."

She is optimistic about her power to make a difference, not simply as a role model for young gay Christians, but by actively working to change hearts and minds. The signs are good. When members of the viciously homophobic Westboro Baptist Church showed up to picket her appearance at the GCN conference, local churchgoers turned out en masse to form a protective circle around the venue and welcome LGBT participants.

We are, she thinks, seeing a tipping point both in wider society and the church. "LGBT voices are speaking up, they're standing up; there's actually a huge movement of pro-LGBT people within the church." Her planned trips into the Bible Belt will see her engage with local groups that are open to discussion. These representatives of the "moveable middle", as they are known, "are genuinely open to hearing personal experience and new ways of interpreting the Bible", says Beeching. There are some fears for her safety; Bible Belt states are also the home of murderous opposition to legal abortion providers, after all, but Beeching is sanguine. "It's worth any risk," she says, to "end up with a lot of people in the room who are genuinely open to walking away with a different outlook."

On the verge of signing a book deal with a major publisher as DIVA went to press, she is looking forward to splitting her time between London and the US as her reinvented career as a writer, speaker and broadcaster unfolds.

The book is about "my journey with faith and sexuality, about authenticity and what happens when you are bold enough to be yourself", she says, but will be more than straightforward autobiography. "It's a funny mixture. It'll be part memoir, and a little bit of theology, because I do think it's important to show people how I interpret the Bible. I think that is quite empowering for the LGBT community, to have lots and lots of theology to challenge people who have very negative anti-

gay views that they say are rooted in their faith."

Combined with "advice for people to step up and take control of their lives and achieve their dreams", it sounds like a genre-busting read. "Well, I'm hoping it will be interesting to a very broad swathe of people. I don't want it to be pigeonholed as a Christian book, or a book about the Bible. I want it to have something in it for everyone."

Another exhilarating consequence of coming out has been her first relationship with a woman, something she says happened quicker than she expected, just a month after she went public. Beeching's joy is palpable. Her partner, who she declines to name ("After putting so much out there, it's just nice to have a bit of privacy"), was also raised a Christian, so they have common ground. She speaks excitedly about the support she gets from the relationship, having someone with whom to share the dramatic highs and lows of recent months.

It's ironic, she notes, that "really homophobic Christians portray LGBT people as living this 'gay lifestyle', where it's all about promiscuity and infidelity and lust, and actually most LGBT people just want what any straight person wants, a person to come home to at the end of the day and grow old with".

She frequently faces the argument that as a gay Christian, she should deny her sexual nature and replies that the

"Aperson issuchan amazing entity,I don'think wecanbe reducedo natureor nurture"

usual comparison with straight Christians forgoing their desires is false.

"It's not ok within the church to be promiscuous and sleep around but for a gay Christian, what you're saying is that you can never dream of having a life partner, you can never be celebrated in a committed dating relationship, you can never get married, so it really frustrates me when straight Christians aren't able to see their own privilege."

There are lessons for all Christians, she continues: "I think all of us have to learn what it is to really love, whether we're straight or gay, and that we have to follow Jesus's teachings. He had some great teachings on love meaning laying down your life for each other. That if you get married, it's about committing to serve that person for better or worse. You have this kind of selfsacrificial love and I really subscribe to that, I just don't think it should be relevant what gender it is of person you're loving."

The argument between campaigners who believe we are "born gay" and Christians who insist that our orientation can be changed is "a bit of a timewaster", asserts Beeching. "A person is such a sacred and amazing entity, I don't think we can be reduced to nature or nurture." Whatever the explanation for our homosexuality, God loves us and wants us to thrive, she believes. "For me, it doesn't make any difference whether [we're] born or made. I think it's about who a person is today and how they innately love and

want to be loved - making sure that we affirm that in people."

Standing at the threshold of her new life, Beeching seems to hold just one regret. "I really miss playing music. To stand in an auditorium and hear 10,000 people singing along to your songs at the top of their lungs is a truly moving experience. In over a decade of doing it I never ceased to be stirred - often to tears - by hearing so many voices using my melodies and lyrics to connect with God. That's probably something I won't get to experience in the same way again, although I'm sure it'll actually be way more meaningful to sing for audiences who truly know and accept me, even if there's only 10 people in the room.

"Numbers don't really matter to me, but I do miss those huge gatherings as they had such a unique, almost 'electric' environment, filled with the energy and anticipation of so many people gathered in one venue to worship God.

"Hopefully I'll see a huge shift within the conservative church in my lifetime and perhaps be back at one of those conferences later in my life to get behind the microphone, plug in my electric guitar, and hear the people sing along to my songs again with the passion they used to." •

For Vicky Beeching's thoughts on women in the church, same-sex marriage and the future of the Anglican Communion, read the article on the DIVA website: tinyurl.com/DIVAVBfuture







home ground. Later this year she'll be journeying back to some of the most conservative states and cities to share her story.

"I'm a little nervous about that because there is a lot of homophobia and violence in those parts of America," she tells me. "But I think it's important, really for the sake of young people. That's my main driving force. Young people that have to wrestle with their identity in those conservative contexts. If I could be in their area and tell my story, maybe it will give them hope."

Once, Beeching herself was one of those kids, albeit growing up in Kent not Arkansas. While she has nothing but praise for her conservative Christian family, her early life was clearly traumatic - she has told of her deep isolation, attributing her academic success (she studied theology at Oxford University) to the fact that she had no life outside school work, as well as her heartbreaking efforts to overcome her sexual orientation, even submitting to "deliverance ministry", a process akin to exorcism.

She came out privately to her family a few months before her public declaration and says that the time taken "as a family, to talk and journey with it" has proven invaluable in enabling them to reach a place of acceptance.

"Even though they don't agree with me about what the Bible says, they are

"It is frustrating to me when straight Christians aren't able to see their own privilege"

able to surrender that to God and love and celebrate me anyway. There's this great Billy Graham quote that says, it's God's job to judge, the Holy Spirit's job to convict and it's my job to love. I think as Christians we sometimes get our job descriptions muddled up; we think it's God's job to love and our job to judge!

"My family, especially my 90-yearold grandpa, who's been a preacher and a pastor all his life, very conservative, he's been able to embrace that quote and let God do the judging and just celebrate me, so now they've all come to a place of being very proud. They watch everything I do, they all listened to my GCN keynote online and they're all delighted about the UN stuff. I feel like it's a miracle actually; I can't believe the love and support that I'm receiving."

She is optimistic about her power to make a difference, not simply as a role model for young gay Christians, but by actively working to change hearts and minds. The signs are good. When members of the viciously homophobic Westboro Baptist Church showed up to picket her appearance at the GCN conference, local churchgoers turned out en masse to form a protective circle around the venue and welcome LGBT participants.

We are, she thinks, seeing a tipping point both in wider society and the church. "LGBT voices are speaking up,

they're standing up; there's actually a huge movement of pro-LGBT people within the church." Her planned trips into the Bible Belt will see her engage with local groups that are open to discussion. These representatives of the "moveable middle", as they are known, "are genuinely open to hearing personal experience and new ways of interpreting the Bible", says Beeching. There are some fears for her safety; Bible Belt states are also the home of murderous opposition to legal abortion providers, after all, but Beeching is sanguine. "It's worth any risk," she says, to "end up with a lot of people in the room who are genuinely open to walking away with a different outlook."

On the verge of signing a book deal with a major publisher as DIVA went to press, she is looking forward to splitting her time between London and the US as her reinvented career as a writer, speaker and broadcaster unfolds.

The book is about "my journey with faith and sexuality, about authenticity and what happens when you are bold enough to be yourself", she says, but will be more than straightforward autobiography. "It's a funny mixture. It'll be part memoir, and a little bit of theology, because I do think it's important to show people how I interpret the Bible. I think that is quite empowering for the LGBT community, to have lots and lots of theology to challenge people who have very negative antigay views that they say are rooted in their faith."

Combined with "advice for people to step up and take control of their lives and achieve their dreams", it sounds like a genre-busting read. "Well, I'm hoping it will be interesting to a very broad swathe of people. I don't want it to be pigeonholed as a Christian book, or a book about the Bible. I want it to have something in it for everyone."

Another exhilarating consequence of coming out has been her first relationship with a woman, something she says happened quicker than she expected, just a month after she went public. Beeching's joy is palpable. Her partner, who she declines to name ("After putting so much out there, it's just nice to have a bit of privacy"), was also raised a Christian, so they have common ground. She speaks excitedly about the support she gets from the relationship, having someone with whom to share the dramatic highs and lows of recent months.

It's ironic, she notes, that "really homophobic Christians portray LGBT people as living this 'gay lifestyle', where it's all about promiscuity and infidelity and lust, and actually most LGBT people just want what any straight person wants, a person to come home to at the end of the day and grow old with".

She frequently faces the argument that as a gay Christian, she should deny her sexual nature and replies that the

"A person is such an amazing entity, I don't think we can be reduced to nature or nurture"

usual comparison with straight Christians forgoing their desires is false.

"It's not ok within the church to be promiscuous and sleep around but for a gay Christian, what you're saying is that you can never dream of having a life partner, you can never be celebrated in a committed dating relationship, you can never get married, so it really frustrates me when straight Christians aren't able to see their own privilege."

There are lessons for all Christians, she continues: "I think all of us have to learn what it is to really love, whether we're straight or gay, and that we have to follow Jesus's teachings. He had some great teachings on love meaning laying down your life for each other. That if you get married, it's about committing to serve that person for better or worse. You have this kind of selfsacrificial love and I really subscribe to that, I just don't think it should be relevant what gender it is of person you're loving."

The argument between campaigners who believe we are "born gay" and Christians who insist that our orientation can be changed is "a bit of a timewaster", asserts Beeching. "A person is such a sacred and amazing entity, I don't think we can be reduced to nature or nurture." Whatever the explanation for our homosexuality, God loves us and wants us to thrive, she believes. "For me, it doesn't make any difference whether [we're] born or made. I think it's about who a person is today and how they innately love and

want to be loved - making sure that we affirm that in people."

Standing at the threshold of her new life, Beeching seems to hold just one regret. "I really miss playing music. To stand in an auditorium and hear 10,000 people singing along to your songs at the top of their lungs is a truly moving experience. In over a decade of doing it I never ceased to be stirred - often to tears - by hearing so many voices using my melodies and lyrics to connect with God. That's probably something I won't get to experience in the same way again, although I'm sure it'll actually be way more meaningful to sing for audiences who truly know and accept me, even if there's only 10 people in the room.

"Numbers don't really matter to me, but I do miss those huge gatherings as they had such a unique, almost 'electric' environment, filled with the energy and anticipation of so many people gathered in one venue to worship God.

"Hopefully I'll see a huge shift within the conservative church in my lifetime and perhaps be back at one of those conferences later in my life to get behind the microphone, plug in my electric guitar, and hear the people sing along to my songs again with the passion they used to." •

For Vicky Beeching's thoughts on women in the church, same-sex marriage and the future of the Anglican Communion, read the article on the DIVA website: tinyurl.com/DIVAVBfuture





DIVA FILM EDITOR LUCY
PETERS PRESENTS HER
PICK OF THE PACKED
PROGRAMME AT THIS YEAR'S
BFI LGBT FILM FESTIVAL

You can wait months for a great lesbian movie to show up, but each spring a whole festival of them comes along at once at BFI Flare, London's recently-rebranded annual LGBT movie extravaganza. This year's fest runs from 19-29 March and highlights the cinematic efforts of filmmakers from across the globe, whether they're newbies working on a shoestring budget or big guns like L Word veteran Angela Robinson. It's a packed programme but here are some tips on what to catch.





OF GIRLS AND HORSES (VON MÄDCHEN UND PFERDEN) (GERMANY)

DIR MONIKA TREUT

**** Languid shots of rolling fields and majestic horses open this slow

and subtle drama set in a riding stables. Alex (Ceci Chuh) has never ridden a horse before – but after she gets into trouble at home, an internship supervised by lesbian riding instructor Nina (Vanida Karun) becomes her last shot at redemption. Chuh delivers a touching performance as a waif who finds it hard to trust or be trusted.



ZOE.MISPLACED (AUSTRALIA)

DIR MEKELLE MILLS

* * * * *

Like Jenni in Broken Gardenias, angry young woman Zoe (Hannah Raven Smith) is a self-proclaimed outsider on the lesbian scene – unimpressed by DJs who just shuffle tracks on their iPods and straight men asking for sex advice. Unfortunately, Mekelle Mills' overlong, studenty debut soon has her spouting cliched dialogue and getting sucked into soap-opera style melodrama. The plot's a stretch and some of the camerawork doesn't do it any favours.



THE ROYAL ROAD (USA) DIR JENNI OLSON

If you're a fan of Alison Bechdel's graphic novels, you might be the right audience for Jenni Olson's cinematic essay on the history of San Francisco, cultural nostalgia and her own romantic entanglement with the past. Through voiceover, she describes the city's origin as an 18th-century Spanish colony and tells stories of her love affairs, as lush panoramic stills of chapels, statues and fountains flicker onscreen.



REGARDING SUSAN SONTAG (USA) DIR NANCY KATES



Films like The Royal Road couldn't have been made without cultural critic Susan Sontag, who was a giant of academia from the 1960s until her death in 2004. Many of her obituaries didn't even mention that she was bisexual, but this workmanlike documentary delves into her relationships with famous women such as choreographer Lucinda Childs and actress Nicole Stéphane. Though semi-closeted, Sontag believed that, "My desire to write is connected to my homosexuality".



DIR CATHERINE GUND

Daredevil choreographer Elizabeth Streb brings a firmly butch aesthetic to her stunt-based style of dance. In search of spectacle, she asks her stoical troop of dancers to duck under spinning iron beams, writhe from chains, slam into mattresses and dive through glass. This fascinating documentary asks why the low-paid young artists are so keen to risk injury, and showcases their spectacular day of performances for the London Olympic games.

STORIES OF OUR LIVES (KENYA) DIR NEST COLLECTIVE

As in many countries across Africa, LGBT people in Kenya face threats to Stories Of Our Lives formed an anonymous collective in order to turn interviews with queer Kenyans into a clutch of exquisite short films.







PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL MONOGAMIST (CANADA)

DIR CHRISTINA ZEIDLER & JOHN MITCHELL

Lesbian romantic comedies might be rare, but it feels even rarer to see a romantic comedy starring a heroine in her 40s. Suave journalist Elsie (Diane Flacks) has perfected the art of breaking up and moving on, but she's starting to wonder if the right woman can ever be found. This fun, refreshing movie features a line-up of eccentric characters: Carolyn Taylor is especially watchable as Elsie's most recent ex-girlfriend.



GIRL TRASH: ALL NIGHT LONG (USA)

DIR ALEX MARTINEZ KONDRACKE

First there was the musical episode of Buffy, then the cheerleader love affair in Glee. Finally, this is the full-length lesbian movie musical you've been waiting for – and it's brilliant. Written by The L Word's Angela Robinson, it's a camp caper stuffed with sorority girls, petty crime, first love and a battle of the bands. Rose Rollins is underused in a 2-D gangsta role, but the rest will make your heart sing.



"Has the lesbian revolution arrived or what?" Beatrice Eli's reaction, on winning the award for Best Pop Artist of 2014 at the prestigious P3 Guld Award ceremony in Sweden in January, is already a classic as far as acceptance speeches go. If we could give her a prize it wouldn't just be for Best Pop Artist, Biggest Lesbian Anthem for hit single Girls or Coolest Couple (we interviewed her bae Silvana Imam in the December issue) but for Best Sapphic Style. DIVA found out how she does it.

DIVA: Hi Beatrice, I like your style! Talk us through it.

BEATRIE ELI: Thanks! I go through different phases. At the moment I'm really into what my friends mothers wore when I was growing up in Farsta, outside of Stockholm. I like classically feminine pieces, make-up and nails that want to be luxurious but that don't necessarily manage to... I also love a classic punk style, or a polished version of it. I think I've embraced my femininity too. Being lightly clad or wearing a skirt and heels is something that I used to be scared of but now I've gone against that fear, which feels fucking great.

That's cool.

I've had different stages of liberation in terms of my clothing and body. I always used to shave everywhere, for example, and [now I've stopped]... That might be breaking some kind of feminine ideal but it's made me feel much more comfortable with my body.

I wanted to ask you about this; your album cover features armpit hair.

I put my arms up because I was posing like that, not to show that I have armpit hair... It just happened naturally and sadly it has turned into a bit of a statement when really it's quite straightforward. It's a nice picture.

> Who are your style icons?

> > Madonna is definitely my biggest source of inspiration, both musically, lyrically

and when it comes to clothing. My crew tour jacket was inspired by her Blonde Ambition tour.

What inspired the styling for the Moment of Clarity video?

I love PJ Harvey's 90s look and the girly witch punk style of [cult American horror movie] The Craft... I was also really inspired by Carmela from The Sopranos, and I love how goth girls dress, like the 17-year-old punk emo girls you see in town who have dyed their own hair and not really succeeded but who still look cool. I generally like style that dares to stand out... I could never do normcore or whatever it's called, I'm the opposite of that.

I'm on a serious budget. Can I still copy your style?

I buy everything secondhand because it's cheap and feels unique. Otherwise I generally think it shows when you're comfortable in something... just be yourself!

Tell us about your P3 Guld outfit.

I've been painting on leather for vears...

Oh, you made them?

Yeah! I didn't have a reference as such, I was just doodling and it turned out alright so I ended up wearing it.

What's #YearOfTheFemme?

It's a statement for me and anyone who wants to join me.... I've previously dressed and behaved in a more

masculine way in order to gain respect... and I'm now trying to regain the strength in being feminine. It's a combination of straightforward feminism and a personal development, of being able to demand space as a feminine woman and to be dressed up and sexy. 2015 is

the year of the femme but so will 2016 be and we will probably continue to deal with this shit for many more years because society isn't equal.

Are labels like femme and butch important?

Let's say I identify as femme, what does that mean? For me it might not mean the same thing as for someone else... I want to bust the myth about what a feminine lesbian is like.

INSPIRED BY **SWEDISH POP SENSATION BEATRICE ELI'S UNIQUE PUNK FEMME** LOOK, DIVA **INTRODUCES A NEW FASHION** FFATURF -WE'RE LIKING YOUR STYLE! **WORDS** BELLA QVIST

When I first came out I went through a butch period, trying to act in a certain way... Then, when I tried to find my own identity no one saw I was lesbian so I wasn't taken seriously. That's why I go on about being lesbian so much... because it's so easy to attribute heterosexuality to me. Also, if I choose to be sexy and look like I might be straight then I'm immediately supposedly available to men and I definitely don't want that.

I heard you said you shaved your hair to avoid the male gaze?

I made that up... I just think it's a cool haircut and even though it's a classic punk haircut it's a lesbian celebration, especially in Stockholm where so many lesbians have it... However, what's happened is that I don't have the same problem with men thinking that I'm interested in them, not because they think I'm a lesbian but rather that I'm a freak.

You put a picture of your "lezzie hand" on Instagram; it's brilliant!

I love painting my nails and stuff... but, you know, it's kind of

tricky having long nails... then I realised I could just not have long nails on all fingers, haha.

Do you have a wardrobe staple?

It's good to have some leather and patent leather,

that always works. If I don't know what to wear, I just dress up as a witch.

Are you and Silvana giving in to the urge to merge?

We thought it was really fun to wear similar outfits to the P3 Guld award ceremony... It's a bit shameful but it's also a nice thing to want to fit together with the person you're in love

ADDITIONAL DIGITAL CONTENT

Finally, you have a song about masturbation called Party In My Pants. What's your favourite pair of pants?

I recently bought a pair of white trousers so I think they're my favourites but I also really like checked trousers, Gwen Stefani style. •

facebook.com/BeatriceEli





British seaside holidays used to be synonymous with sticky souvenirs, arcades, fish and chips and donkeys, but in the last few years traditional seaside resorts on the south coast of England have started to offer more as they begin to thrive again thanks to local residents and investors reviving our wonderful coastline.

Over the past 10 years the south coast has seen a sea-change in its towns and villages and nowhere more so than east Sussex's Eastbourne, Bexhill and Hastings. Following an influx of creatives and generous funding initiatives from the likes of Arts Council England and the Jerwood Foundation, it is art as well as the natural splendour of the sea that is drawing visitors to its shores. Eastbourne's Towner gallery has even been nominated for a Condé Nast Traveller Innovation and Design Award, dontchaknow?

I started my adventure in East-bourne, a place I hadn't visited since I took a care-package to my kid brother years ago when he was studying there. Back then, as now, the highlights for me were the stunning coastline and the highest chalk cliff in the land to the west – Beachy Head – in an area of outstanding natural beauty. More recently, and crucially for today's itinerary, is the new Towner contemporary art museum, the starting place for my cultural coastal trail eastwards towards Hastings.

Visiting the award-winning gallery and museum, which opened on College Road between the railway station and the beach in 2009, I discovered a hidden treasure trove of contemporary art. The Towner's permanent collection houses one of the largest archives of work by renowned Sussex artist Eric Ravilious, with its views of Sussex, the South Downs and surrounding areas, and the gallery is unique in attaining National Beacon Status for Culture for hard-to-reach groups as a result of its work with disadvantaged local residents.

As I strolled through the sunlit gallery rooms I was warmly welcomed by the curator of a fascinating show, Twixt Two Worlds. To explore the transition from still to moving images at the turn of the 20th century, Gaia Tedone selected works by artists including Jane and Louise Wilson and Saskia Olde Wolbers to examine how both media were used by the

then-controversial practitioners of psychoanalysis and the often charlatan magic-makers who claimed they were able to capture evil spirits. Downstairs, as I left the building, I caught the whirring flicker of moving images from the shortlisted winners of the Jarman Award. In March, come here for John Virtue's powerful paintings of the sea, sip coffee in the friendly cafe or mooch around the artsy gifts in the gallery shop.

I spent an hour or so in the Towner before heading by train to see Bexhill's iconic De La Warr pavillion. There, I glided through an exhibition of Magnum photographs curated by an artist/ writer, an anthropologist and a photographer, the three collections of images representing three perspectives on photographs that captured the 20th century. Photographer Hannah Starkey notes that over 90% of these iconic images were created by men, so her interest in the work of female photographers produced a fascinating visual narrative and dialogue linked across decades.

Provided you time it right, the place to eat and drink in Bexhill is the Pavillion Cafe Bar and Kitchen. Once you've had enough – and quite honestly I could have stayed the whole day – there's only one way to get to your next and final stop, Hastings: by bicycle.

Rob Graham, owner of Bexhill Bicycle Hire shop over the road from the Pavillion will sort you out for the 30-minute trip to Hastings and I guarantee there's no better way to traverse the coastline. Rolling along the path, past the fishermen's huts and pebble beach that adjoin the sea's edge, is nothing short of exhilarating.

On the way to Hastings, I passed through St Leonard's on Sea, just under a mile away from central Hastings. With its women-run arts hub at Kings Road's Claremont Studios, the Hastings Art Forum gallery and community centre in the Marina, independent galleries such as Kave and the gallery-come-tea-shop Baker Mamonova on Norman Road, St Len's is a magnet for creative lesbians. Along from the Marina I bumped into a lesbian couple setting up a new seafront tapas bar that will be open by summer, when Hastings' 910-foot-long pier is scheduled to reopen following fire damage that saw it close in 2008. Once JANE
CZYZSELSKA
DISCOVERS
EAST SUSSEX'S
STUNNING
COASTAL ART
TRAIL ON AN
EXHILARATING
DAY TRIP





back in service it will host a restaurant, circuses, plays, concerts, film events, farmers' markets, urban sports and more, we're told.

Next, I tied up my bike behind the Jerwood Gallery on the Stade and slipped into the gallery space, which opened in 2012. Designed to fit with the surroundings of Hastings Old Town, the 8,000 iridescent black tiles which cover the building's exterior evoke the tarred boards of the nearby fishermen's huts.

There I met Ella Lewis-Collins who showed me round the permanent collection as well the contemporary rooms where you will find works by lesbian, bisexual and gay artists including Maggi Hambling and Duncan Grant. When I visited, there was a lovely DIY-feel exhibition of drawings by artists including Cornelia Parker and Rachel Whiteread to showcase the place of drawing in the work of leading and emerging artists.

Loved by locals and urban emigres alike, Hastings enjoys a long artistic tradition. Strong links with the town and its surrounding coastline were forged by a number of artists in the Jerwood Collection, most notably John Bratby and Edward Burra, whose

work will be featured at the Jerwood in March. Building on the area's artistic pedigree, the Coastal Currents Arts Festival in August and September is an annual feast of creative work from artists in the St Leonards and Hastings area that's not to be missed.

As I said thank you and goodbye to Ella and her team, I spotted my wife outside through the gallery window, camera in hand, striding towards the beach, grinning. The blue sky was a peaceful backdrop to the quiet thrum of cars, seagull calls and the sound of pint glasses clinking from the pub over the road. I walked up the hill, towards the High Street, drawn by the scent of woodsmoke curling upwards from the Old Town chimneys. Swan House, the award-winning five-star gold boutique B&B, where owners Brendan and Lionel were waiting to say hello with their gorgeous terrier, Matilda, provided a luxurious end to my adventure. Well, not quite the end. Our hosts suggested we dined at Pomegranate - where incidentally Lionel has also waved his interior design magic wand - on fashionable George Street. There we sampled a medley of items from the menu and raised our glasses to a perfect day. •

The south coast of England has seen a sea-change















Edinburgh Rocks

Since moving to London 15 months ago, I've mourned my home town like a lost love and relish any opportunity to go home. It's not the tourist traps I miss but the hidden gems around every corner. Here are my picks for what to do in Auld Reekie. Hint: the castle isn't one of them!

You'll be spoilt for choice looking to rest your head somewhere in Edinburgh. At the top end of the scale, there's the Balmoral, whose stunning clock has been a fixture of the city's skyline for over a century. It might not be cheap, but luxury is guaranteed. Then there's G&V (formerly Hotel Missoni) in the Old Town, perfect for design lovers looking to splash the cash (gandvhotel.com). If it's good enough for Lady Gaga, it's good enough for us. For visitors on a budget, Smart City Hostels (smartcityhostels.com) are redefining the hostel experience, and you'd be hard-pressed to beat Castle Rock Hostel (castlerockedinburgh.com) for a stay to remember. It's cheap, friendly, full of character and if that's not enough to sell it, Edinburgh Castle is literally on your doorstep.

CARRIE LYELL SHARES HER **TIPS FOR** LIVING LIKE A LOCAL IN SCOTLAND'S CAPITAL CITY



Flights from London start from as little as £18 with Ryanair. If you'd rather take the train, check out eastcoast.co.uk for special offers and up-to-date

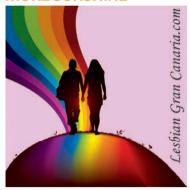
prices.

If you really want to experience Edinburgh, get off the Royal Mile and live like a local. First stop: Leith Walk. It might seem a little rough around the edges but look closer and you'll find an amazing Portuguese custard house (casa-amiga.com) and the best Mexican food outside of Mexico (loscardos.com) as well as some great pubs, including the Black Fox (blackfoxleith.com). Down by the Shore, Mimi's Bakehouse (mimisbakehouse.com) is a must for belly-busting breakfasts and an amazing selection of cake. Full? Walk off lunch along the Water of Leith to the Royal Botanic Gardens or further along to Dean Village, where you'll find the excellent Gallery of Modern Art. On the other side of the city, Tollcross is another lively neighbourhood with a lot going on. Catch a film at The Cameo (picturehouses.co.uk), a burger at the Cuckoo's Nest (tinyurl.com/ DIVAcuckoo) and if the weather's nice, a round of golf at Bruntsfield Links. Want to go to the seaside? Jump on a bus to Portobello and play the arcades, or check the tides and plan a trip to Cramond Island. If you really must do some touristy things, you won't regret checking out Camera Obscura

(camera-obscura.co.uk), Dynamic Earth (dynamicearth.co.uk) or Edinburgh Zoo (edinburghzoo.org.uk).

The scene in Edinburgh has died a slow, painful death over the years, with many bars and clubs closing their doors, but there are still a few gems around the city's pink triangle. The Street (thestreetbaredinburgh.co.uk) recently celebrated 10 years and is always a good night out and although CC Blooms (ccbloomsedinburgh.com) is known to locals as CC Dooms, it's a (somewhat) affectionate nickname. Nom de Plume is a gay-owned cafe, while on the other side of Calton Hill, the Regent is a top boozer serving real ale and a fine macaroni cheese. Elsewhere, Dive is an eclectic anything-goes party aiming to breathe a bit of queer life into the city (dive-party.org.uk). Recently rehoused in Summerhall, it's the perfect place to be yourself, dress up and let go. And in a similar vein, Hot Mess (facebook.com/ hotmessdisco) is a "straight friendly" dance party with a loyal following of bears, hipsters, goths, dykes, tomboys and everyone in between looking for an alternative to the mainstream. **O**

NEWSFLASH MORE SUNSHINE



If you're drowning in winter rain and desperate for some sun, you'll be pleased to hear that British Airways has added another three new routes to its 2015 (Gatwick) schedule. So now you book to travel (from March onwards) direct to Seville in Spain, Funchal in Madeira and Las Palmas in Gran Canaria. All rather LBT-friendly places, we're pleased to report... Gran Canaria in particular has a whole host of things to do, places to stay and bars to hit, all of which ought to heat up your spring!

lesbiangrancanaria.com | britishairways.com

GAYCATION

FILM FOR THE FAITHFUL, CALIFORNIA

This month from 26 Feb to 1 March in Pasadena, California, a rather special film festival takes place. Level Ground is about creating a safe space for discussion and dialogue on difficult subjects via the medium of art. Asking questions such as "does sexuality have a colour" and examining "what happened when Jesus came out", this new festival aims to faithfully portray the struggles and questions of non-heterosexuals who wish to live in a Christian world.

onlevelground.org







LADYBREAK

LESBIAN LAUSANNE

It might not be the top of your holiday hit-list but the French-speaking Swiss city of Lausanne, situated on the shore of Lake Geneva, has a lot to offer the LBT traveller, including the warmest of welcomes and a lot of cheese. Replete with great restaurants, cocktail bars, some beautiful scenery and its Olympic museum (olympic.org/museum), Lausanne is deservedly building a reputation as a lesbian and bisexual hotspot. If you're there to party, extend your weekend break to ensure you can go out on Sunday night to one of Europe's largest nightclubs, Le Mad in Lausanne's Flon district (madclub.ch) and then on to a Trixx event (gay-party.com) at the ABC club-bar.

lausanne-tourisme.ch/en

HOT HOTEL MANHATTAN BREAKFAST

If you're in the Big Apple this winter, don't miss the historic 5* Loews Regency New York hotel's Manhattan Power Breakfast. Not only are the American classics on the menu considered to make up the best breakfast in town, but this Park Avenue hotspot is a regular dining favourite for the city's political and business leaders and this month marks the one year anniversary of the hotel's grand re-opening after \$1 million refurbishment. Oh, and if you can't bear to leave, you might like to check out one of the new signature suites, created by designer Nate Berkus.

loewshotels.com





QUEER WOMEN IN THE SOUTH WEST HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT

Indigo is an informal business and social networking group for LBT women, based in Bristol, and is the largest LBT group in the region.

Over the past five years they've established a strong following in the LBT community and a reputation for providing fun, welcoming social events in positive, female-friendly environments. A three-woman team runs Indigo in their spare time - Anna Rutherford, Suzanne Doyle and Tash Jones – all passionate about creating great events for women to meet other like-minded women.

Indigo is held on the first Thursday of every month at Goldbrick House, Bristol, often supplemented with special events featuring comediennes, singers and their popular speed meets. Hush is their quarterly club night, attracting hundreds of women from England and Wales, featuring female DJs with a mix of playful pop, dancefloor indie, RnB and tunes guaranteed to fill the dancefloor. From the same team, the fabulous Night Circus event was the biggest and best party yet - an evening of mystery, dance and high spirits hosted at a secret location. **①**

Want in on the action? The next Indigo takes place on 5 March, and Hush in April.

indigonetwork.co.uk

INDIGO AND HUSH









VORDS CARRIE LYELL, PHOTOS NATASHA DAVIES-WALKE, TASH JONES, MATT SEOM







My Scene MANCHESTER





I'M A GAY WOMAN AND THE MANAGING DIRECTOR OF

homesweethome cleaningservices .co.uk, WHICH COVERS NORTH WALES, CHESTER AND THE WIRRAL. I LOVE TO TRAVEL AND CHILL OUT ON FARAWAY SHORES, DRINKING STRAWBERRY DAQUIRIS."

BEST PLACE FOR BRUNCH OR COFFEE WITH FRIENDS

Via Fossa always has a relaxed atmosphere. You can either chill out in a quiet corner or sit outside and watch the world pass by. The decor has a medieval feel to it (I don't for one minute think I'm Maid Marian).

viamanchester.co.uk

BEST PLACE FOR A ROMANTIC DATE

A romantic date for me will always be Cloud 23. It's a restaurant on the 23rd floor of the Beetham Tower. In the evening you have a view of the whole city.

cloud23bar.com

WHERE DO YOU GO TO PARTY, PULL, RELAX, ESCAPE?

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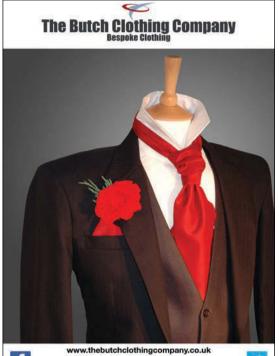




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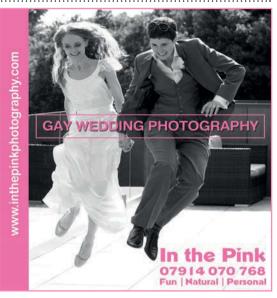
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CLASSIFIED FEATURE - THE KNOLL, LAKESIDE IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

THE PERFECT CHOICE FOR INTIMATE WEDDINGS AND HOUSE PARTIES









So as the trees start to come back to life and we eagerly await the daffodils, we thought it time to catch up with our friends at DIVA magazine, especially as this month features weddings.

Small weddings and house parties are our speciality. We're a dedicated team of women who can cater for your every need on that special day. Prices start from £4,000 to hire our facilities for two nights. Check out our Facebook page for pictures of some of the wonderful events we have hosted.

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all the luxuries and tranquility you'd want. With gorgeous food, afternoon teas and stunning Lake District scenery, you'd be mad not to!

We are also offering our legendary New Year's Party for women on 31 December and 1 January. It always goes down a storm and the all-inclusive two-night New Year package will let you sample the Knoll's fantastic food. Call now as it's a popular event!

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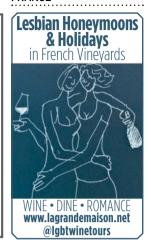
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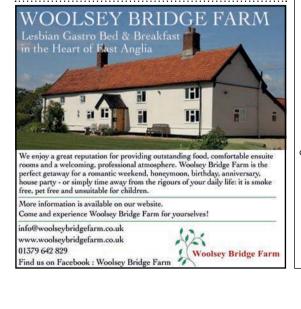
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CLASSIFIED FEATURE - REPARATIVE THERAPY

HAVE YOU HAD, OR DO YOU KNOW ANYONE THAT HAS, EXPERIENCE OF THIS IN THE UK?



This can include: any psychological or talking therapy that aims to "cure" same sex attraction.

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Would you be interested in participating in a study to explore your experience?

Participants will be interviewed by a researcher and all personal details will be kept confidential.

You will need to have experience of reparative therapy in the UK, be able to understand spoken English and aged 18 or over to participate in this study.

This study is part of a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and has been approved by the School of Social Sciences, Business and Law Research Ethics Committee at Teesside University.





The Red Room

I stared at my reflection trying not to fall into my own dilated pupils like a modern Narcissus. The David Lynch night was the only thing that brought me to this hipster dive, a converted warehouse where I'd spent most of the night avoiding everyone I knew.

Out of the corner of my eye I caught the outline of Olivia, she was tipsy. A beautiful little vintage doll, a femme fatale with thick blond ringlets falling loosely around her shoulders wearing a burgundy dress with plunging neckline that her breasts tried to escape from when she leaned forward to reapply her lipstick. She looked at me in the mirror and smiled.

"I'm bored Alex. How about you?" "Same, I guess."

"We should have some fun..."

I watched her reflection as she walked toward me.

"Don't you have a boyfriend somewhere?"

"Split up."

"Sorry to hear."

"Isn't everyone."

Her fingertips blazed goosebumps up my arm.

"There's a lot of bad boys who'd make a play for you, you should be careful." I teased, knowing she could look after herself.

"You mean bois like you?" she squeezed my bicep; was it for emphasis or an unconscious gesture? I'd dressed for the night with a rockabilly look; short sleeved shirt, jeans and braces. I didn't try too hard, my hair was softly quiffed but ruffled.

"Especially bois like me."

Tension hung heavily like threads tied from every nerve in my body to hers. She pressed her body against me and whispered, "Dance with me anyway," before leading me out to the bar.

The place was packed and bathed in red light, everyone looked fucked up while Blue Frank reverberated around the walls. Rivers of red fabric flowed from the ceiling to the painted floor of eye-fucking black/white zigzags.

Olivia leaned back in my arms, head against my shoulder, ass grinding against my crotch. I pulled her closer, my lips on her neck, teeth threatening to devour her. She turned to face me and threw her arms lazily around my neck, hands through my hair, soft moans in my ear. Several times our lips brushed without kissing. Her eyes were black in the red light, staring arrows through my heart. I knew she wouldn't resist so I kissed her, her mouth yielding instantly. The tacky taste of lipstick mixed with sticky sweet Jäger on her tongue as she dissolved in my arms.

With her fingers twisting in locks of my hair, she broke the kiss and whispered, "Fuck me like a boi".

I lifted her and carried her to a darkened corner, enveloped in the scent of White Gardenia. We delved into the red fabric, my body pressing hers against the wall as my hands found her breasts, thumbs grazing her nipples. She gasped and bit my lip with the heavy guitars of The Pink Room a lifetime away from us, not caring about the 200 people just the other side.

A BOI-GRRRL HOOK-UP ENLIVENS A DULL CLUB NIGHT SHORT STORY B FITZGERALD

"There's a lot of bad boys who'd make a play for you, you should be careful"

In one fluid movement I slipped my hand into her lace pants to her swollen clit, my thumb teasing. She dug her nails into my neck and darted her tongue into my mouth. Slowly I eased inside her, sticky wetness trickling down into the palm of my hand. She buried her face in my shoulder, moaning, muscles tensing. I pulled out, almost completely, before thrusting in hard again. She grasped my shoulders, biting my neck and moaning a breathless "fuck" in my ear as I set a steady rhythm of alternately slowfucking and hard-fucking her, inner walls tightening to suck me further inside. She was whispering dirty little promises to me in a sex-drunk haze, making me fuck her harder, faster, less control. Her breathing was shallow, breasts flushed, sweat tricking into the valley between as a deep orgasm built within.

With my free hand, I gently pulled her back to kiss her throat, collarbone, swollen blood-red lips. Her hands were all over me, arms wrapping around me as the final ascent consumed her, hips grinding to meet my thrusts, breath hot on my shoulder, low guttural moans until finally she came; a gush of hot silk, heaving breasts, gripping me, trembling. I stroked her until the last tremor passed and she straightened her dress up; she looked so perfect in the red light, all tousled hair and post-sex flush. I waited for excuses to leave but they never came, instead she kissed me deeply and sighed, "Take me home and dance with me all night". •

ex at the start of a new relationship can be amazing. There's so much exploring to do, you can hardly wait to get your hands on each other, and somehow you always find the time despite still having to go to work and do your laundry.

Fast-forward any time from a few months to several years and the picture can look quite different. Life somehow takes over from lust. And you may find that your sex-life has dwindled to the point of non-existent.

Sometimes there's a clear reason why: one or both of you may be dealing with an illness, experiencing stress, taking medications that lower libido, looking after children or ageing parents, or going through some other life change like the menopause, relocating, or bereavement. Other times it just happens gradually and it can be difficult to understand why you are no longer having sex.

So what can you do about it? First of all, ask yourself if you really do want a sex-life. If you had a magic wand and could make sex part of your relationship again, would you want to? We live in a society that places a lot of emphasis on the importance of sex but, ultimately, each of us has to decide how important it is to us. This requires total honesty with yourself. If things have been difficult it may be easier to shrug it off and say sex doesn't matter to you. But if you were in a new relationship, if you knew you only had a year to live, if you believed

WHEN SEX "DRIES UP" IN A RELATIONSHIP, **HOW CAN YOU** GET BACK ON TRACK? **WORDS** ANNA MOZNAZ

you would never experience sexual touch ever again - would this be ok for you?

If you decide that sex is important and that you would like to have it in your life, the next step is to find out how your partner feels. This is all about finding out if the willingness for sex is still there. Even if you think it might be hard to get it back, to make it exciting again, or to trust that you can have a good sex-life, if there is mutual willingness you are already half-way there

It's best to have these conversations in a non-heated and non-sexual environment. Let your partner know that you love them, that this is important to you, and that you would really appreciate some time to talk it through together. Avoid making any accusations or laying blame; focus on what you can do to move forward rather than staying stuck in the past.

Sometimes it is helpful to have an impartial third person to help facilitate these conversations and you may want to consider talking with a relationship or sex counsellor. Similarly, if you or your partner have experienced trauma such as sexual abuse or sexual violence, you may find it helpful to seek further support from a qualified professional.

Being able to talk to each other, and being able to really listen to each other, are key. Be willing to share feelings, to describe what you would like, and to agree on things you are both prepared to try. Remind yourselves

that you are finding ways to strengthen and grow your relationship. This is a new phase and you are exploring together.

If one person wants to resume a sex life and the other doesn't there are further questions to ask. Are you willing to stay in a sexless relationship? Are there other ways that the sex-seeking partner can have their needs met? For example, through self-pleasuring, opening up the relationship, or visiting a sex worker. Or is no sex a deal-breaker and means that the relationship will have to end?

For those who do want to try and bring sex back into their existing relationship, here are some ideas to explore:

1. MASTURBATE

When sex begins to fade in a relationship we often feel we should "keep" any sexual desire for time with our partner rather than "waste" it on ourselves. In fact, giving yourself regular pleasure is a great way to keep your sexual self nourished and awake. It is also an important reminder that you can always be your own lover: not as a second best, but rather as a way of honouring the sexual being that you are regardless of your relationship status.

2. TAKE IT SLOWLY

Start with cuddling and kissing. When sex has gone, often these have gone too. Kissing can be extremely sensual and erotic (remember how you used to

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@ladygarden69

kiss in the early days?). Enjoy reconnecting in this way, with no pressure to take things further, but allowing time to enjoy and savour each other's kisses.

3. MAKE A DATE

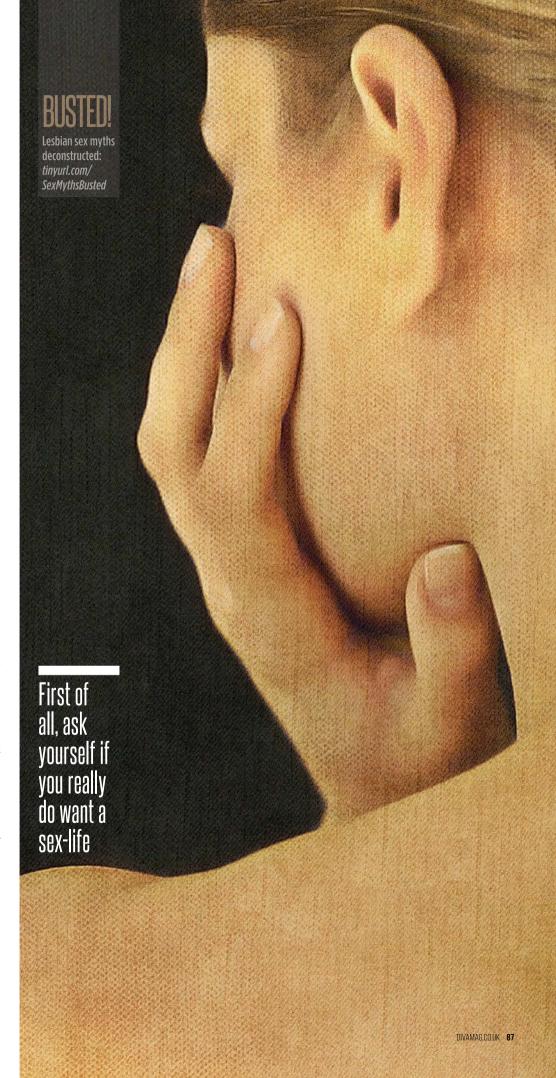
Spontaneous sex or a belief that it "should just happen" is one of the greatest sex myths. As sexual empowerment coach Amy Jo Goddard notes: "The reality is that our lives are busy and we fill up our time with things easily, so if we don't schedule time for sex, or put a little effort into maintaining sexual connection with a lover, it just won't happen." Again, think back to the early days of being in a relationship: you made dates, you enjoyed the anticipation of having sex, and you made it a priority.

4. ASK FOR WHAT YOU WANT, AND ASK YOUR PARTNER WHAT THEY WOULD LIKE TOO

Our sexual selves are forever evolving and changing. What you enjoyed one, five or 10 years ago may not be the same any more so be willing to share with your partner what you would like now. Would you prefer to go to a hotel for a night together and get away from all your "to do" lists at home? Did you used to enjoy penetration but now find it uncomfortable? Would you like to introduce a vibrator or other sex toys into your love-life? Do you need your partner to go slower, to maybe give you a massage, or just stroke your back while you get used to being physically intimate again?

5. OPEN UP TO INTIMACY

Sex gives us a huge opportunity to be truly intimate with another person. But sometimes intimacy can be scary. Some people feel more comfortable than others about sharing their physical self, whilst others are better at sharing their emotions. Sexual intimacy offers a chance to share physically, emotionally, and also on an even deeper level. It is ok to acknowledge that this may feel a little frightening or like stepping into the unknown. Staying present to your feelings and being aware of any limiting thoughts will help. Be kind and compassionate with yourself and your partner. And, above all, set your intention to act from a place of love and to honour your desires. **O**





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BIG & BEAUITFUL F, 49, big heart, fun, seeks F to be her soul mate. B'ham. Box 400696

F, 45, likes a laugh & socialising. Seeks F for fun & possible r/ship. Mancs. Box 789818 \(\sqrt{DV} \) 789818

Attractive bi lady, 57, seeks F of similar age for fun nights & more. Cotswolds. Box 515282 ⊠ DV 515282

F, 53, slim build, WLTM F for f/ship, hopefully leading to LTR. W. Yorks. Box 411452

F, 54, seeks solvent, gay F for good laughs & r/ship. Mancs. Box 870496

DV 870496

AMIABLE, HONEST
F, 45, seeks genuine F for good f/ship
& r/ship. Slough. Box 188074
DEEP, PASSIONATE
F, 54, seeks stimulating F with

something to say for conversation & more. SE Ldn/anywhere. Box 269592

F, 61, GSOH, has two dogs, seeks F for good f/ship & further. Omagh/Co. Tyrone. Box 660622 ⊠ DV 660622

F, 62, n/s, large build, enjoys walks, theatre & film. WLTM F, 60+, for a forever r/ship. Kent. Box 704273

F, 52, enjoys the gym, fishing, pool, nights in/out, seeks honest F, similar

ingits in/out, seeks nonest f, similar age, for f/ship, maybe more. Swindon. Box 271087 ⊠ DV 271087 FRIENDLY, PLUMP, PRETTY Bisexual lady, 61, seeks similar F for fun times. Gloucs. Box 237013 GENTIME EDICATION. NUINE, FRIENDLY

F, 75, non-drinker, seeks F companion, GSOH, with car, for cinema, good food & more. Devon. Box 828190 SINCERE, LOVING

F, 62, likes animals, quiet evenings & occasional meals out. Seeks F for loving r/ship. Herts. Box 405562

F, 60, n/s, likes cinema, her dogs & walks. Seeks similar F for f/ship & maybe more. Cornwall. Box 289505 ☑ DV 289505

HONEST, EAGER
F, 43, seeks F for long-term, lasting

r/ship. Darlington. Box 204027 RE. LOVING

F, 46, likes animals, seeks F, 40+, for loving r/ship. Herts. Box 934884

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Sincere, loving F, 56, seeks lovely, laid-back, feminine F to share life love & happiness. Exeter. Box 623594

DV 623594

SENSUAL, HONEST F, 52, medium build, seeks F for good times, maybe more. Soton. Box 499883

HONEST, BISEXUAL F, 49, 5'4", large build, seeks nice lady for f/ship & maybe more. Powys. Box 807825

Box 80/825 ENTIRELY HONEST F, 55, 5'10", has a dog & cat, likes long walks, a bit disabled, seeks F for good r/ship. Darlington. Box 381150

F, 72, n/s, likes holidays, socialising & conversation. Seeks loving, caring F for good r/ship. Lancs. Box 822209

F, 60s, likes beach walks, golf & photography. Seeks kind, affectionate lady, GSOH, for r/ship. Hants. Box 457627 OUTGOING, BUBBLY

OUTGOING, BUBBLY F, 49, fun, likes nights in/out & socialising. Seeks similar F for great r/ship. Co. Down. Box 657198 DV 657198 KIND-HEARTED, HONEST

F, 33, 5'8", medium build, likes walks, cinema & nights in. Seeks lovely F for r/ship. Co. Antrim. Box 194316 SINCERE, HAPPY

F, 50s, likes gardens & travel. Seeks nice F for something intimate. Belfast. Box 372189

F, 52, likes meals out, cinema & walks. Seeks caring, loving F for r/ship. Lancs. Box 745729 ⊠ DV 745729

F, 23, likes walks, films & good wine. Seeks F for good times & r/ship. Glasgow. Box 459448

AMOROUS, EASY-GOING
F. 48, likes the coast, cinema & animals. Seeks similar F for good r/ship, Glocs, Box 563608

F, 36, seeks feminine F, 30-40, for theatre, meals out & close times.
Mancs. Box 978625 ☑ DV 978625
CUTE, GENTLE, BUTCH

F, 40, black, shaved head, cuddly build, seeks honest, feminine, loyal gay F for f/ship & maybe r/ship. W Mids. Box 507405 RY OUTGOIN

F, 55, loves travel & the outdoors. Seeks gentle, feminine F, similar age, for great, loving r/ship. Devon. Box 527387 M DV 527387

F, 39, seeks feminine F for f/ship & possible r/ship. Notts. Box 736789

DV 736789

F, 52, feminine, likes meals out,

football & walks. Seeks F for good times & r/ship. Lancs. Box 794840 FUN-LOVING, FASY-GOING F, 40, likes laughs & nights out. Seeks similar F for fun & f/ship+. Mancs.

Box 583561

F, 61, sincere, solvent, loves cooking, r, 61, Sincere, Solvent, toves Cooking nature, wine & meals out. Seeks sincere M for something special & lasting. Mancs. Box 632500 CARING & LOYAL

Gay F, 58, smoker, seeks special feminine gay lady for a close r/ship. Mansfield/Notts. Box 132991

DV 132991 APPY, BI-CURIOUS

F, 48, blonde, loves doing nice things, seeks nice F for socialising, laughs & intimacy. Mancs. Box 115157

GOOD CONVERSATION F, 49, seeks F, 40-50, with good

outlook, for good conversation & plenty of laughs. Mancs. Box 177389

F, 32, likes socialising & partying. Seeks F to see what happens. Ldn. Box 470300

F, 19, likes the arts & music, looking for caring F for loving r/ship. Humberside. Box 782392 ⊠ DV 782392 SOCIABLE, HONES

F. 19. smoker, social drinker, likes r, 19, smoker, social drinker, likes reading & country walks. Seeks F for r/ship. Glocs. Box 454386 SOMETHING WONDERFUL F, 22, sociable & sincere, has a cat,

likes gardening & animals. Seeks bubbly F, similar age, for something wonderful. Essex. Box 721492

F, 53, GSOH, seeks adventurous F for r/ship. Ldn, anywhere. Box 589011

Lonely F 37 seeks mixed race F for good lasting r/ship & shared future. Coventry. Box 100798 ☑ DV 100798 SPIRITUAL, SINCERE

F, 38, single mum, likes travel & writing. Seeks F for coffee, chats, possibly intimacy & more. Co. Down. Box 861404 \subseteq DV 861404

CREATIVE, OUTGOING, FUN F, 30s, staffie owner, loves DJ'ing,

clubbing, singing, drawing & socialising, WLTM loyal, mixed-race gay F for r/ship. Cov. Box 783205

F, 45, likes cats, seeks F for loving r/ship. Stockport Box 442022
GENUINE, CURVY F, 36, likes cinema & rollerskating.

Seeks F for good times & more. E Anglia. Box 538084

EMININE, YOUTHFUL , 51, GSOH, thoughtful, n/s, has ME, likes animals & mystery. Seeks understanding, caring F, 38-55, for laughs+. L'pool. Box 913989

Edugins - Lpool. Box 913989

DV 913989

POSITIVE, OUTGOING, PROFESS
F, 51, seeks F for dancing in the kitchen, dog walks on the beach, good food, laughter & romance.
Newcastle. Box 436275 ewcastle. Box 436275

F. 38. seeks F who is kind to strangers

& keen to share their best memories with someone special, London. Box 223704 ⋈ DV 223704 COSY NIGHTS IN

Sincere F. 62, medium build, likes animals, walks & some reading. Seeks n/s F f/ship & good r/ship. Warwicks. Box 733509 ⊠ DV 733509 LOVING, LOYAL, FAITHFUL

F, 41, n/s, enjoys all the good things, seeks F, 36-48, for f/ship, fun times & maybe more. Devon. Box 868555 DV 868555

LOUD, PROUD, CONFIDENT

F, 40, bubbly, likes dance & films. Seeks F for wild nights out & passionate nights in. Milton Keynes. Box 273975 ⊠ DV 273975 FUN, TOMBOY

F, 36, likes football, cinema & nights out. Seeks feminine F, 30-40, for r/ship. Mancs. Box 798661

☑ DV 798661

DARK-HAIRED, SOCIABLE

F, 45, 5'1", medium build, likes socialising, travel & motorbikes. Seeks similar F for r/ship. W Ldn, Surrey. Box 187431 DV 187431 ATTRACTIVE, FEMININE

F, 49, likes the gym, reading & holidays. Seeks feminine lady for good r/ship. Yorks. Box 999700

DV 999700

E BLONDE

F, 37, single mum, seeks honest, loving F for real r/ship. Kent. Box 853359 DV 853359 LIPSTICK LESBIAN

Attract, easy-going F, 50s, likes most things, seeks sim late 40s-50s F. Text preferred. Gloucs. Box 704295

CARING, LOYAL & HONES F, 69, loves good books & conversation & WLTM a free-thinking

F with a sense of fun for f/ship, maybe more. Fife. Box 342583 DV 342583

JUST HAVEN'T MET YOU YET

Caring, genuine F, 53, 5'3", likes the outdoors, holidays & the coast.

Seeks similar F for laughs & r/ship. Cheshire. Box 220543 ⊠ DV 220543

F, 58, seeks lady, 45-60, for f/ship, maybe more. Nottingham. Box 957270 ⊠ DV 957270

YOUNG-AT-HEART FEM

F, 51, likes most things, seeks similar F for f/ship, maybe more. Glocs. Box 403344

SOFT BUTCH F, 53, cuddly build, seeks down-to-earth, feminine F, 50+, for a quiet, normal life. Bristol. Box 801751 F, 42, 5'4", slim build, WLTM random,

nice Fs. Mancs. Box 293527
FRIENDLY & SOCIABLE
F, 22, single mum, likes cinema & nights out. Seeks F for something special. York. Box 681238

DV 681238 RE BLONDE

F, 67, likes gardening & travel. Seeks F, similar age, for close times & more. Ldn. Box 898375

NO STRINGS

FEMALES RULE! F, 22, seeks F for great times. B'ham.

Box 556726 EASY-GOING, SOCIAL

F, 35, likes concerts, shopping & meals out. Seeks feminine F for fun times, Mancs, Box 123477

F. 36. genuine, broad-minded, enjoys swimming, music & horse-riding, seeks F for fun times. Suffolk.

Box 255518

SENSUAL, FEMININE
F, 43, bisexual, seeks similar F for sensuality & experimentation. S. Ldn. Box 591109 NEW TO THIS

Inexperienced F, 51, seeks F for fun times. Soton. Box 467075

JUST FRIENDS

F couple, 46, love music & meals out. Seeks like-minded F friends for nights out in Glasgow, Box 282737

DV 282737

LIFE BEGINS...
Animal-loving F, 33, seeks friends for socialising, laughter, intelligent conversation & a little bit of mischief Somerset. Box 757543 ⊠ DV 757543 NCERE, TRUSTING

F, 48, likes the outdoors & learning Spanish. Seeks Fs for chats & genuine f/ship. Ldn. Box 359170

Customer Services: Dating FAQs & Advice Line 0906 200 1036 Complaints & Service Provider

0330 333 6946

orks. 18+ only. Service provided by ATS, PO Box 788, London ECIV 7ZA. DISCLAIMER: D

Let's face it, it's impossible not to produce waste. But, thankfully, I've discovered an extremely simple way for my face to be less wasteful: buy local. Break that circle that sees us purchasing bottles of face-cream made on the other side of the world (often in China, which has a particularly dodgy record on animal testing). flown over to us, and then chucked in the bin when empty. Bizarrely, our rubbish is then often shipped off to another country - notably China - as UK landfills are at bursting point. Not an uplifting story. But there's hope! Enter a host of small ethical companies making products here in the UK, from predominantly locally-sourced materials. And these companies offer other benefits, like recyclable or reusable packaging, ethical transparency and a commitment to local and global environmental causes. In addition, they are keen to engage with their consumers and will often reward feedback, suggestions and brand lovalty – so do let them know your thoughts! They don't have the advertising power of their big business competitors, however, so let me introduce you to some of my recent discoveries...

Joanna Benecke is a writer with a green tea addiction who believes grooming doesn't have to be a dirty word. @ioannabenecke



WHY BUY BRITISH?

ETHICAL BEAUTY FAN JOANNA BENECKE IS GOING LOCO(AL)

CONSCIOUS SKINCARE

Handmade in Wales. Conscious (as the name suggests) epitomises ethical skincare. Every ingredient in each all-natural product serves a purpose; none are added for colour, fragrance or filling. All packaging (which is very minimalist unisex chic) is recycled or recyclable and the company even uses solar technology to generate its own electricity and hot water! (NB, body butters and shampoo are vegetarian, everything else is vegan.)

FROM £2.99-£29.99

GROOMING

OUESTION?

FMAIL EDIT@ DIVAMAG.CO.UK OR conscious-skincare.com



LEMON BALM HYDROLAT

Boosting and pore-tightening for sluggish skin. A purist's dream containing only three ingredients.

£13.99 FOR 100ML

NATURAL EMPATHY

At first I found the brand name a bit silly. but after some consideration I realised that I was being silly: it's a vegan - and therefore empathetic – range, made from natural ingredients like omega-rich British rapeseed oil. So why shouldn't Natural Empathy call it like it is? The award-winning spa-standard products themselves offer high quality at affordable prices. (Don't miss the no-nasties vegan candles! Sweet Orange, Geranium & Chamomile is a real winner.)

FROM £3.50-£25

crvstalspring.co.uk

A holy grail gentle cleansing lotion for combination skin! Long-lasting and fabulous.

£14.99 FOR 200ML





Founded by 24-year-old yearn Rose Brown (pictured), this family-run business prides itself on its ethics. Rose says, "We're on a mission to change the way people see their bath and beauty products. Our range is natural, vegan and halal certified; products are made by hand here in the UK". With over 150 items to choose from (including an unscented range for sensitive skin) all regisered with the Vegan Society, there's something for everyone, and you can buy it on the high street.

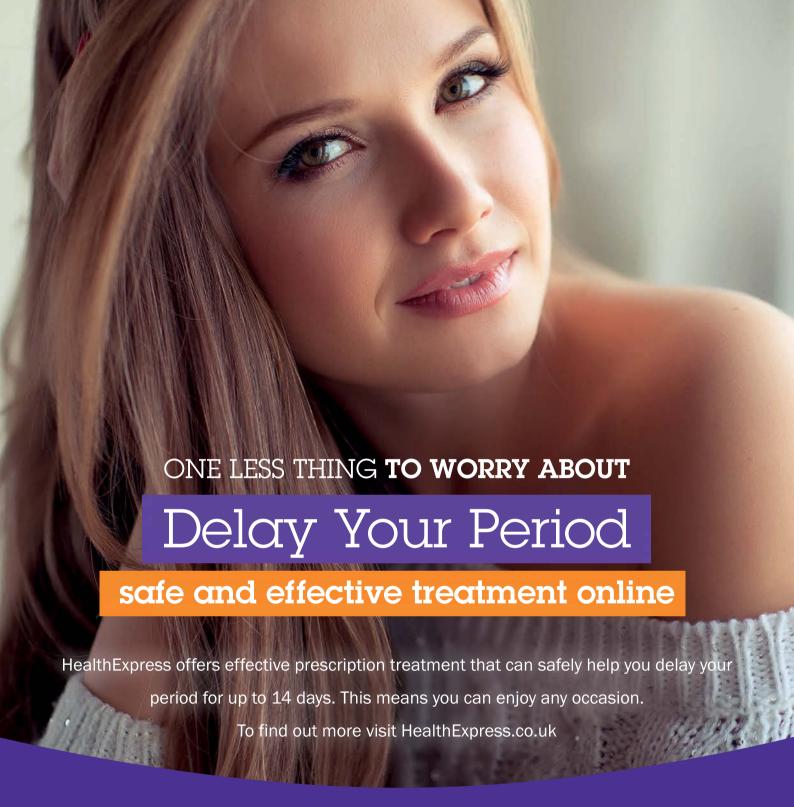
FROM £3.75

Available at Holland & Barretts stores and phbethicalbeauty.co.uk



SKIN REPAIR GEL

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DIVA editor Jane Czyzselska is a qualified integrative counsellor, registered with the BACP. Jane cannot offer individual responses or answer every single question. Please note that by submitting your question to Jane, you are giving your permission for her to use your question as the basis of her next column, and your story will be shared on Facebook for advice from readers. Jane may not be able to tell you that she is using your question, but will try to email you the reply if she does. All questions will be kept anonymous and key details and facts may be changed to protect your identity. You can find out more about Jane's counselling services at shoreditchtherapy.com

F YOU'VF

WE CAN HELP

HOW CAN I COME OUT OF THE CLOSET AND FIND A GIRLFRIEND WHO'S CHILD-FRIENDLY?

Dear Jane

I read the letter in last month's edition of DIVA and found myself feeling very like the reader who talked about how hard it is being in the closet. I really felt for her and I was relieved to realised that there may be others like me, who are also "in limbo" as far as their sexual identity and lifestyle is concerned.

It has taken me ages to get up the courage to admit to myself that I'm a lesbian and I'm lucky enough to have friends who are understanding and I've even met some lesbians locally.

The thing is that I feel like I'm leading a double life right now and it feels unsafe to let the whole world know about how I now see myself.

With my lesbian friends I feel comfortable, as if I'm the real me but when I'm at home with my teenage son I have to pretend that I'm something I'm not.

Also, as I've said, I'm a mum, and that means that it makes it all the more difficult to meet lesbians.

Once they know, they usually run a mile. And yes, as the reader asked, if you have any tips on moving out of the "friend" zone, that would be helpful!

Lesbian-in-hiding

Dear Lesbian-in-hiding,

I am glad to hear that reading DIVA has helped you to realise you're not the only woman to feel this way, and hopefully makes you feel more connected with other women who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

It's great that you're able to speak to a few people about your sexuality but I can hear you're not ready to tell your son just yet. Try not to give yourself a hard time about this. It may well be a while before it feels right. Trust yourself and trust the process of this life transition. Rome wasn't built in a day and the same is true as you start to build your vision for the future.

You mention that you feel as if you are living a double life at the moment and that sounds really hard. I wonder what you think it might take for you to be more transparent about your identity and desire with your child? You say you feel as though you are pretending but I'll bet there are lots of things you're not pretending about. The love for your son, your friends, etc. Perhaps it would help to think about the losses and the gains of pretending and being more "honest"? Reflecting on these questions may help you to get a clearer sense of what needs to happen next.

On the matter of "moving out of the friend zone", it's really up to you to decide what feels most comfortable for you. If you know the friend is single or available, perhaps you could tell her how you feel. If she already knows your situation and she's cool, she'll understand you might want to take things slowly.

As for the women who back off when you tell them they have kids. Well, just consider that a blessing. It may be frustrating and hurtful but at least it means you know they're not right for you.

And finally, if making a move on friends you've met on the scene feels too risky, you could of course try one of the many dating sites available. Sites such as divadate.co.uk or pinksofa.com, or perhaps one of the new lesbian dating apps, such as dattch.com. Whatever you choose, I wish you all the best.

READER'S REPLY

feel more confident to just be who you know you are, and when you are at one with yourself, sometimes it doesn't matter so much what those around you think of you. Then, when the time is right for you, with your inner strength and love for who you are, telling those you love about the parts of you that you haven't yet shared with them will be a much smaller step than it may feel right now. Fear comes from our mind, we must understand the route of our fear before we can conquer it. But you absolutely can conquer it.

Sophie Rose Simmons

Being in the closet about your sexuality can be terribly detrimental to your wellbeing and happiness, and reaching that point where you are half in and half out (so to speak!) can be very confusing and cause you to put a lot of pressure on yourself.

I would say, breathe, listen to your inner voice, trust in who you are deep underneath it all, love who you are, and in turn life will give you back goodness. You must not forget to admire yourself for getting where you've got to so far. It can be a long journey to true happiness and contentment, try to focus on the positive aspects: you are a mum, that's wonderful and it sounds like you have a supportive network of like-minded friends. There are many out there who wouldn't see you being a mum as a bad thing, let that help you navigate yourself to love – if a woman is negative about dating women with children, you know she's not going to float your boat! Be true to who you are. love who you are and trust in what you want out of life and your ability to make it a reality. If you can do that, the external world around you will be much easier to deal with, you will





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Iondonspermbankdonors.com

Figures illustrate the number of donors we see each month from a diverse range of professions

Could you adopt?

For many, the thought of fostering or adopting a child can be daunting. The myths and rumours that have circulated in the past may have made us assume that LGBT people cannot adopt a child. This simply isn't the case.

In the UK the only rules for adoption are that you must be over 21 years old, a UK resident and not have any criminal convictions that could affect a child's upbringing. That's it. Married, gay, disabled, unemployed or 70 years old, you have the right to apply to adopt. However, adoption and fostering are not straightforward processes. New Family Social is a charity and network set up in 2007 to help LGBT adopters and foster carers, and those considering adoption or fostering. Tor Docherty, the organisation's chief executive, advises those considering adoption to "find other people who've done it, because they'll be able to tell you how [the experience] really is".

There are nearly 69,000 children in care in the UK (baaf.org.uk). In a bid to find family homes for those able to be adopted, the processes for adoption and fostering have been made simpler and clearer than ever. To begin with, you must register and go through the initial checks and formal evaluation, then you'll move on to the training and assessment stage where a social worker will come in to assess your strengths. Assuming everything goes well, the third stage will be to match you with the right child or children. Finally, once you've found your ideal match and spent some time with them, they will move in and, if you are adopting, you can apply to the court to become their legal parent/s. Foster carers do not go to court and will receive an allowance to cover the cost of caring for the child.

Although LGBT singles and couples have the same rights as heterosexuals, many who have applied to adopt have found it more difficult and feel that there can be a longer wait. Docherty reassures us that "the government have recently put in place strict timescales for the assessment of adopters". In the past, assessments were drawn-

ADOPTION AGENCIES ARE WELCOMING LGBT PEOPLE WHO HOPE TO FOSTER OR **ADOPT**

WORDS AMY MCDONNELL. **ADDITIONAL** REPORTING LOUISE CAROLIN

adopters

may have

empathy

with a child

who feels

outsider"

like an



out and many were put off by the thought of waiting years to adopt a child. Realistically, it should take about a year from your first call to starting your "forever family". However, if you find you are experiencing a longer wait, it may be worth having a "shop around" until you find the agency for you. You won't have to look too far as, currently, over half of the agencies in the UK are registered to New Family Social and are actively seeking LGBT adopters and foster carers. Positive progress has been made; 7% of the children adopted last year were adopted by same-sex couples, compared to just 3% the year before.

Last year, New Family Social did research into the most popular concerns that people have when considering bringing a child into their home. Of 400 surveyed, 36% thought the process would be more difficult because they were LGBT and 51% thought they'd only be offered the hardest to place children. Although we know that LGBT people are more likely to be welcoming of these children, Docherty

lgbtadoptfosterweek.org.uk newfamilysocial.org.uk first4adoption.org.uk

says: "People [think] that this is the only option they will have and that used to be the case, there wasn't any other choice, whereas now there is."

Dated concerns about same-sex parents persist. "There can be quite a lot of assumptions about gender roles," says Docherty. "If it's a lesbian couple, sometimes people can make the leap that the child will not know anything about more traditionally masculine things like football or DIY." Nevertheless, the tides of social opinion are turning. Research has proven that LGBT families support adopted children just as well, if not better than heterosexual parents. "[As] LGBT [people] have experiences [with] discrimination and marginalisation themselves then they have empathy with a child who feels like an outsider," explains Docherty. Prospective adopters may worry that their child could be subjected to teasing and bullying due to their parents' sexual orientation. While this cannot be easily prevented, the most positive way to approach the subject is to invite questions from your child and be as honest and open as you can, she advises.

So if you've ever considered adoption, don't let your preconceptions stop you. There are thousands of children waiting to go to a loving home and if that's something you can offer, then pick up the phone and make that first step towards your new family. •



Narcissism is defined as "excessive interest in or admiration of oneself and one's physical appearance". Enter, the selfie. Maybe I am just a grumpy old codger. but as I look back at social media trends, I feel the selfie is one of the most awful of all. No-one minds the occasional photo of someone. The operative word here is "occasional".

In the last month I have kept a tally of selfies on my feeds. I have had to suffer through the "just woken up" selfie, the "post-haircut" selfie, the "I-love-my-cat more-than words-can-express" selfie, the "my-cat-eating" selfie, the "my-cat-sleeping" selfie. Then there's the

"me-and-my-amazing-girlfriend" selfie (this one is particularly irritating, because it must be repeated every day, obviously, or the relationship dies), the "post-break-up-sad-face" selfies (caused no doubt by skipping a couples selfie). the "new-dress/shoes/hat" selfie. The list goes on... All of you out there with aching arms, trying to figure out how to position yourself, loved ones and pets for the perfect image, despair no more. The selfie stick has arrived. We have now reached the point where narcissism begins to eat itself. Thanks, technology.

Basically, people are now buying YOUR CURRENT expensive broom handles with a holder on the end for a phone. No longer must you squint into the lens at a mere arm's length. Now you can irritate us by snapping yourself from a few feet away. I can barely wait to see what delights this will add to my feeds.

However, far be it from me to rain on your parade entirely. So, for the sake of balance, here are two selfie-facilitating devices which caught my eye. *shudders*

Rhoda Meek is an IT consultant and designer with a social media addiction, a crochet habit, a RaspberryPi and two left feet.

wodieskodie.com @wodieskodie



SELFIE LOVE

RHODA MEEK OVERCOMES HER HORROR OF ONLINE SELE-PORTRAITURE TO RECOMMEND THE ODD GADGET



I don't know why no-one thought of this before. Why have a hairbrush and a selfie stick, when you can insert your phone into your hairbrush... Selfie Brush! It even has a mirrored strip so that you can check how gorgeous you are before taking the shot. And I am told that the brush itself gives marvellous results... I can't actually believe I just typed that.

SELFIE POD

Selfie sticks are 10 a penny, just stick the words into Amazon. This UK company stood out though. Selfie Pods have a range of accessories for your phone, including lenses, selfie sticks and Go Pro mounts. Go Pros are acceptable in my world, so I let this site through my "silent scream" filter.

selfiepods.co.uk

WHAT'S

There exists a belfie stick. It pivots and provides extra reach. I am told that it is especially good for taking images of your behind. In the words of Starbuck: may the gods help us all.

You can pre-order one for insane price of \$80 (around £52) at n right now. You didn't hear it from me.

PS For the record, no, if you suck your cheeks in and pout when taking a selfie, it doesn't make you look hotter, it makes you look like a constipated parrot. PPS It did not end well for Narcissus.





ART, CULTURE

AND PROTEST

(WITH A

HEALTHY

DOSE OF **DISCO** DANCING)

UNTIL 21.03

Sheffield Theatres, Sheffield Sheffield holds a Sarah Kane season across its most prestigious play-spaces. Kane's writing changed the face of British theatre; pointing up the violence, baseness and rot pervading modern society through characters that also yearn for love, tenderness and understanding. sheffieldtheatres.co.uk/season/ sarah-kane-season

••••••

26.02

SEX EDUCATION

Leith Academy, Edinburgh How can educators provide a better learning environment by embracing equality? This LGBT History Month event enquires. tinyurl.com/DIVALeith

THERE MUST BE AN ANGEL

Bangkok Bar, Manchester An unholy congregation for gueer divas and non-believers. Welcome back, Black Angel, we've missed you terribly. Bollywood, bhangra and Arabic sounds plus live PA from fierce gueer hip-hop act Aiah UK.

tinyurl.com/DIVABlackAngel

I KISSED A GIRL

Vogue Fabrics, London Love pop, love it good and love it indiscriminately. Synthetic sounds from Holly Valance, S Club 7 and Jamelia. Straight Nasty provides a safe space for you to work through that repressed Cat Deeley

tinyurl.com/DIVAStraightNasty

Send vour listings to

For weekly listings,

SEASIDE QUEASE

Citywide venues, Brighton and

Manchester SICK! Festival is the first festival in the UK dedicated to revealing and debating contemporary humanness in all its most urgent physical, mental and social challenges. Seat-edge theatre, film and performance.

..............

sickfestival.com

Citywide venues, Dundee Dundee Women's Festival offers a cornucopia of activities, events, exhibitions, drama, film, comedy, dance, sport, therapies and workshops, which support, stimulate, illuminate and elucidate. tinyurl.com/DIVADundee

3.03

#ASYLUMFORADERONKE

Royal Courts of Justice, London Nigerian activist Aderonke Apata remains at risk of deportation to her death as long as the UK Home Office remains unwilling to admit that she is lesbian. Aderonke's case is up for review in March. Show your solidarity: pack the courtroom.

tinyurl.com/SupportAderonke

A NEW ADVENTURE

New Unity, London Sober gueer dance party for (tee)totally awesome people! Get your intoxication from punk righteousness and your easy thrills from pop wrongness.

tinvurl.com/DIVAadventure

DECADE/DANCE

RVT, London

Whats that you say? Gala? Queer Gala? Queer Bar Wotever Gala? Sorry — Bar Wotever is 10 and they're having a big queer gala?! Yes please.

woteverworld.com





6.3-31.5

CARRY ON CARRINGTON

Tate, Liverpool

Surrealist painter and novelist Leonora Carrington enjoys a well overdue dusting off at Tate Liverpool this March. A veritable treasure trove of her fantastical creations featuring film, manuscript, painting and sculpture.

tate.org.uk

Field Place, Worthing Sussex's second Out and Proud Ball returns with a large measure of cabaret, swing and burlesque for nostalgic gays. Former Strangler Paul Roberts presides. tinvurl.com/DIVAWorthing •••••

NIGHT WALKING

Parkers Piece, Cambridge Reclaim the Night is an annual protest against street harassment, gender oppression, and sexual violence. The main march will consist of all self-defining women, non-binary people, and people who feel they face structural misogyny whether or not they (always) define as a woman. tinyurl.com/CambridgeReclaim

PEACE BE WITH YOU

Sheffield Cathedral, Sheffield

That face, that jawline, those collarbones, that voooiiiiiiiiiicccceee. Peace and love and Peace and Peace and Peace.

heatherpeace.com

28.03

MINAJ À TROIS

02 Arena, London See Nicki Minai silence the haters this March. Hits and skits from the highlyskilled rapper as she paints London pink. Mypinkfriday.com

.....

TAKE THIS WALTZ

Hackney Attic, London Pining for those halcoon days when women were gentlemen about dating? And tinder was just an archaic word for a dry flammable material needed to make a fire? Dancing and wooing for dapper dykes and their fans upstairs at the Picturehouse.

woteverworld.com

DOWNLOAD IT ON 20 MARCH IN SHOPS ON 26 MARCH





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